

Mockingbird

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John "Soap" MacTavish/Simon "Ghost" Riley

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John "Soap" MacTavish, Simon "Ghost" Riley, John Price (Call of Duty), Kyle "Gaz" Garrick, Original Child Character(s), Alejandro Vargas, Rodolfo Parra, Kate Laswell

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Found Family, ready made family vibes, Family Feels, Minor Character Death, Oblivious John "Soap" MacTavish, Protective Simon "Ghost" Riley, Soapghost as dads, Slow Burn, Getting Together, They're both jealous, they're both oblivious, they both kinda possessive over each other, but not in a toxic way, not at all, Fluff, Comfort, Therapy, Kid Fic, First Kiss, slight spice, but - Freeform, No Smut, Angst, Fluff and Angst, Domestic Fluff, Panic Attacks, Autistic Simon "Ghost" Riley, John "Soap" MacTavish Has ADHD, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD, Past Child Abuse, Implied/Referenced Child Abuse, those last two tags are about ghost not the soapghost kids, Bullying, Dissociation, Marriage Proposal

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by [eddie_dxaz](#)

Summary

There was a loud knocking on the door. All three children were crying for their own reasons and Soap felt as if he'd lose his mind at any moment. It was so overwhelming. Somehow, war felt easier than this. "Leah, give your brother back his toy," He commands softly, picking up Sophie from her rocker.

Leah yells out, "But I want it!"

"Yes," Soap says, making his way to the door, "I understand but you snatched it from his hands. You have plenty of other toys you can play with."

"No! I want this one."

Alec sobs louder and Soaps head feels like it's about to explode. Sophie needs to get fed, he's aware. But right now so much is going on. How the hell did his sister do this?

"Leah-" He's cut off as he trips over a Lego set. He starts hopping on one foot, just inches from the door and has to bite his lips to stop himself from cursing. Sophie screams at the top of her lungs.

"I know," He coos, "I'm sorry. I'll get you fed in a moment."

He adjusts her and throws open the door. On the other side is the last person he'd ever expect to see.

—

Or

Soaps sister dies and leaves him her children. Ghost can't return to work. he shows up on his doorstep, looking for a place to stay.

A Death In The family

Soap broke.

Every part inside of him fell apart immediately at the news. His sister, his beautiful, amazing older sister had gotten into a car accident with her husband and three kids. Only the kids survived. He had been in the common area when he got the call.

The team was playing cards, a happy aura between all of them as they laughed at Gaz obviously cheating again. Price and him were arguing loudly about it when his phone started vibrating in his pocket. He pulled it out.

His mother was calling which immediately sent an unnerving feeling down his spine as he glanced at the time. She should be in bed by now. He stands, walking away from the group a little and immediately answering the call.

On the other end was loud sobbing that could be heard probably from miles away. She was speaking incoherently, rushed. His friends quieted down at the sound before he heard two chairs screech against the floor, along with multiple pairs of footsteps. "Ma, I can't understand you. What's wrong?" He asked, patiently.

"She's dead!" She wailed, "My baby is dead."

Alarm coursed through his veins. A coldness followed as he processed the words. Her baby was dead. She was dead. One of his sisters was dead. Tears pricked at his eyes as he croaked, "Ma, who? Which one? Is it Anna or Clara?"

"Anna," She manages, "They got in a car accident."

He felt like his world collapsed in on him. Flashbacks of his older sister practically helping to raise him flooded through his mind as tears began to freely fall. She was his best friend growing up as they were only nine months apart. They did everything together. Not that he hoped it was Clara, his younger, either.

He felt himself stumbling backwards and a hand on his back caught him, before rubbing circles soothingly. Soap felt so many things at once. Disbelief, shock, anger, grief— but it all came to a startling halt. They. She said they. "Chris? The kids. Are they okay?"

"Chris is gone too, John. The kids are alright. They lived. Some drunk driver hit them head on and— I just don't understand? Why?" She sobbed again, "It's not supposed to be like this. I go first. Me. But now I have to bury my baby. My eldest daughter. What am I supposed to do?"

He didn't have answers for her. But, he knew she wasn't looking for them. She was just letting her grief out freely as she talked to, probably not even aware of what she was saying. Soap let out a shaky breath. She then says, "I still have to call Clara. Then the kids are going to stay with me until they go through her wishes... So I have to go. Will you be coming home?"

"Of course. I'll talk to Price once we hang up."

"Alright," She sniffles, "I love you."

"I love you too, mom."

She hangs up and Soap can feel his resolve slipping. He slowly brings the phone down, hands visibly shaking as he does so. She can't be gone. He just saw her at Christmas. Anna is gone? He turns.

Ghost and Price are both standing behind him, concern clear on their faces. The hand, that he now knows belonged to his lieutenant, slides to his arm gripping it. He meets his eyes. Then, he breaks.

Absolutely shatters.

Soap's knees collapse in on him and two arms catch him before he falls as loud sobs leave his lips. He blindly grabs at whoever it was, not entirely here at the moment due to his emotions overtaking him. There's a soft, "Johnny, I got you" in his ears as a hand comes up to cradle the back of his head.

"My sister's dead," He whispers.

Price grants his leave that night, telling him to pack his bags since he's leaving in the morning. A numb had overtaken him as he did so. He thinks that when he broke in front of his friends, a piece never came back to him when he reassembled. Every few moments he'll let out a choked out sob. But then take a deep breath and compose himself. Yet no matter what, his eyes still feel wet even if tears aren't falling from them.

A tentative knock is sounding on his door before it opens. Gaz is standing there, sympathy clear on his face. "Hey Soap," He greets quietly.

"Hi, Gaz."

He comes up to him then, placing a hand on his shoulder. "How you doing, mate?" he asks. Soap just gives the fellow sergeant an incredulous look causing him to wince slightly in response. Then, Gaz is wrapping him up in the tightest hug he's ever received from him. The weight feels comforting. When Soap lets out a choked out noise, he squeezes tighter with quiet, gentle soothing coming from him.

"You're going to be alright, mate."

Soap hopes to a God he doesn't believe in anymore that that's true.

—

It was after the funeral when his world really got flipped off its axis and hurled into the sun at full speed. Anna's oldest, Leah, was in his arms as tears streamed down her face and gross boogers leaked from her nostrils. There were a couple of cuts on her face from the accident. Her long, brown hair was curled in a delicate way and her black dress was still neatly on her as she refused to change. There was a knock on the door.

The three year old, Alec, looks over at it from his spot on the floor with Clara. The little car in his hands halted. Soap watches his father cast a confused glance at his mother, who had the newborn, Sophie, in her arms. He made his way to the door. Upon opening it, an older, official looking lad with a briefcase stood there with a neutral expression on his face. None of them recognized him. "Hi, sir. My name is Harold Gerber. I'm a lawyer. I'm here to see a John Mactavish?" The man says.

Soap immediately stands and makes his way over to stand behind his father. "That would be me," He says. Leah grips onto his now tear stained suit tighter. The man nods, wordlessly pointing to the inside of the small house and both Mactavish men step aside to let him in. Harold steps in, setting the briefcase on the coffee table. His eyes dance between Alec and Leah.

Soap sets his niece down with a, "Why don't you two go play outside, yeah? Let the adults talk."

Leah looks like she wants to object but tender upon looking at Harold, causing her to grab her brother's arm and race out the back door. Soap's mom makes her way closer to them as the lawyer sits, opening the briefcase to pull out some papers. "I'll cut right to the chase, alright?"

The family nods. He directs his attention onto Soap, saying, "Your sister left you everything. The house, the kids—"

"What?" John can't help but cut him off, "The kids? She left me the kids?"

He snatches the paper out of his hand and immediately realizes he's staring at a will. Sure enough, as he reads, he realizes that it says in the event of her husband passing as well that John Mactavish, her younger brother, is expected to care for her three children. He blinks. Why would she leave him with her children? Half of them growing up, he's been on a whole other continent. He doesn't know the first thing about taking care of kids.

Harold stares at him, unamused. But, doesn't say anything as he processes it. His heart was pulling him in all kinds of different directions as he read it over and over again. The kids were... Everything to him. When away, he'd write letters with funny little drawings on them for the little ones. When Leah was born, Soap had requested leave so that he could meet the wee rascal.

However, if he did this, he'd have to give up his career. Something that makes him feel whole. It makes him soar with purpose and confidence in who he is. Plus, the 141 is there. They're his family also. If he never came back, would they replace him? Would they move on?

Ghost is there.

Simon "Ghost" Riley; the man he had fallen hopelessly in love with last year after the events of Las Almas. Would he be able to give him up? To leave? After they've gotten so close? Ghost certainly wouldn't come visit. The military is that man's whole career.

But this is the last thing his sister left him with. Her last wishes. She had confidence that he could do the job right and he doesn't know if he could turn it down. Anna always had so much faith in him. Even when they were younger and he had no idea what he'd do with his life. She was his best friend. After their parents had responded poorly to his coming out, she had been there to catch him. To tell him what they were saying was wrong. That she loved him.

He swallows, "Did she say why?"

Harold sighs, "Yes. She had told me your parents were getting older and couldn't keep up with raising three more kids. Anna didn't want to do that to them. Clara is too young. She's only twenty-two and still in college. You, however, are twenty seven with a stable income along with more life experience. She also said she doesn't know anyone else in your family well enough to trust them to raise her children. All money from her career and her husband's goes to you also. It's for the kids. If you'd like to turn it down, that's fine. But we'll need to figure out an arrangement."

Soap nods, looking down at the writing again. A steady hand lands on his shoulder with a tight squeeze. He has no doubt it's his father. It's something he's done since he himself was a child. It was a comforting gesture meant to give him a clear head to decide a big decision.

He could turn it down. Go back to living life. But he knows he won't. Abandoning those kids would haunt him for the rest of his life if he did. Plus, Anna would probably rise from her grave and beat him senseless if he did.

"I'll do it."

Harold smiles, "Good man."

Simon haunts his brain again. But he can't be selfish like that. He just can't. Not when there's three children that need someone to raise them involved. He has no idea how he'll do it on his own. Just an hour ago he was a single bachelor with nothing else to worry about but himself. Now, he's suddenly a single dad with three mouths to feed and no idea how the fuck to even raise them.

The phone rings once before it's picked up immediately. A new set of nerves settle in his stomach as the man he looks up to as a father figure answers with a, "Hello?"

"Hey, Price," Johnny manages, "I have some bad news."

"What's wrong?" He asks, concern lacing his voice.

"I can't come back, sir. I'm sorry. Anna left me with her children. I thought about turning it down but... I Just cant. And I'm not going to raise them from a base. I'll feel too guilty leaving them like that," He

explains. Soap leans against his childhood bedroom wall, picking at the slightly chipped blue paint. A frown had etched itself onto his lips as pain rips deep in his heart at the idea of quitting the one thing that made him feel like him. The thing he's wanted since he was a teenager visiting his cousin on base. It all feels so long ago now. Which it is. But he hates to let it go.

"I see," Price mumbles. It's quiet between the two of them for a moment. Both men mourning the end of a chapter. The sound of a book slamming shut echos in the back of both of their minds.

"I'm sorry, sir."

"Don't be. I completely understand. We'll miss you dearly but this is certainly more important. I'll send a car to pick you up tomorrow so you can come pack your things. I'll inform the team..."

"Thank you, sir," Soap sighs, "For everything."

A knot forms in his throat after the words leave his mouth. It causes his voice to crack slightly at the end of the sentence and he knows the captain had heard it. A sad chuckle resonates from the other end, "This isn't goodbye, son."

"Feels like it is."

"It's not. We're a family. I'll always be a part of your life, Mactavish, even if I'm not your captain."

A warm feeling erupts in his chest. However, before he can even respond through the speakers sounds another voice rumbling a loud, "What?" Soap instantly knows who it is. The nice feeling drops. It turns into a cold, icy fist clenching his heart. Loud rustling and thumping is heard, as if someone's trying to snatch the phone away from the old man.

"Ghost just walked in," Price informs, "I have to go. Be ready tomorrow at 0900."

Then Price hung up.

Alone

Chapter Summary

Ghost deals with the news badly. As he would, honestly. Soap experiences being a single dad.

"Price—"

"Ghost," Price cuts him off, "Wait until Garrick is here."

The captain tries to stand and walk away but Ghost steps in front of him. He's towering over the man in an anxious manner, rather than his usual intimidation tactic which never works on Price anyways. He couldn't have heard him right? Johnny wasn't leaving. He couldn't leave. "No, Price. Please," He begs, "I need you to tell me. Johnny's not coming back?"

Ghost never begs. It's just not something that would come from him. Never in a million years. Apparently, except when it comes to Johnny and the possibility of him leaving. For good. Price sets his lips in a thin line. He takes a once over at the lieutenant. Then, he sighs out sadly, "No, son. He's not."

The world crashes down on him. Everything blurs, turning into tilting and whirling rather than the steady sight it had just been. Somewhere deep in him shatters. Why was he reacting to this so badly? Johnny could leave whenever he wants. He's not like him. He has family. Family that he needs to look out for.

Perhaps, he thought they had more time. More time for what exactly? To die? He should be glad that Johnny is leaving the military to live a normal civilian life. He won't have to spend every waking moment on missions anymore practically on top of him to make sure that no harm comes to him. He's going to be safe. So why does it hurt so bad?

"Why?" He doesn't even register that it's him asking the question at that moment. He was too lost in his own head. His own *feelings*.

"His sister left him her kids. He has a more important job now, Simon. We can't get in the way of that. We have to let him go."

He wants to say they can. That Johnny belongs here. There's no letting go of the hurricane that is John Mactavish. He blows into peoples

lives, full speed and rips down every last wall you built up around yourself to protect you. Now, it's gone and he's staring at the wreck left behind, wondering how he'll even begin to put it all back together again.

The worst part about it? He knows it's true. They can't get in the way of that. If Joseph had lived all that time ago, he would've dropped everything to ensure that he was brought up safe and happy.

"Simon," Price whispers, "Let him do it. Either that or go with him. I won't stop you, son. I'll understand."

That brings Ghost back into his own body. His brain wraps around the words that were just spoken to him, not fully calculating it. Go with him?

It's a tempting idea. But Ghost knows he's not built for that type of life. He's a machine. Hardly even a man. The man in him died so long ago that a normal civilian life is out of question for him at this point. He wouldn't do that to Johnny.

So he can't.

—

Soap stands in front of his sister's house with his bags and three kids all latching onto him as they stare at the building they once called home. When he had gone to pick up his stuff from the base, Ghost hadn't been there and it disappointed him that he will never get to say goodbye to the man that he had fallen for. Price had said he'd gone on a solo mission this morning. He'll never get closure from that situation but maybe it's for the best.

He didn't even know if Simon liked men. Still, he could've ripped off the bandage and told him how he felt before fucking off to the middle of Scotland's countryside with three children he hardly knew. He loved them dearly but he hadn't been around much since before any of them were even born. Not to mention that he doesn't know the first thing about being a parent.

Gaz and Price had said their admittedly tearful goodbyes to him, promising him that they won't be strangers. He misses it all dearly. Waking away from that base for the last time felt like a fucking gut punch, even if he did have a more important job to do.

"Uncle John," Leah squeaks, squeezing his hand tightly. Soap shakes

himself out of his thoughts, looking down at his niece. Her bottom lip was quivering and she looked up at him with tearful eyes that shone with nothing but sadness along with fear.

He asked, "What's wrong, Leah?"

He leans down to her height, letting go of her to wipe a stray tear from her face. Alec curls into his side immediately, staring at the house with wide eyes. "I don't want to go in," She whimpers, "They're not in there anymore."

His eyes widened. That's right. They haven't been back home since the accident and he's sure that them going into their home for the first time without their parents is probably severely traumatizing. He repositions himself so he can wrap an arm around both Alec and Leah as he says, "I know. It's scary. But this is still your home okay? They're still there, even if you can't see them. They're always with you. All three of you. Plus, I'll be right by your side alright?"

Both of the children nod at him while Sophie snores soundly in his other arm. He places gentle kisses on all three of their foreheads before standing and holding out his arm. They both latch onto it immediately. The four of them slowly make their way to the house until they're standing at the front door, staring at it. Soap hesitantly pulls away to reach into his pocket, pulling out the key. He sticks it into the keyhole and opens the door wide enough for them to stand in the doorway. None of them moved.

It looked so stale. The open floor plan making it much more colder looking than it's normal bright yellowish tint. The house was dark, contrasting all the happy memories that had been in there before. Christmas', birthdays, game nights. All of it seemed to fade into nothingness as everything laid untouched, just how Anna had left it. Soap flips on the lights. He takes a deep breath and steps into the house.

The smell of his older sister fills his nose immediately and it takes everything in him not to break down at that moment. He had to be strong for the kids. Leah follows him, Alec in toe.

He makes his way over to the kitchen with a, "You guys hungry?"

"Aye," Alec's small voice answers. Little feet pound against the hardwood as his nephew runs into the room before gripping onto his leg. He looks down at him. He has a thumb jammed in his mouth and Soap bends down to gently remove the digit.

“Hey,” He whispers, “Don’t do that, Alec. You’ll damage your teeth, okay?”

The three year old pouts at him. Then, he sticks his face into his arm, now deciding to cling onto that instead. Soap sighs. How is he supposed to feed these kids with a baby in his hold and a toddler holding onto him for dear life? He frowns.

He’s just going to have to be patient with them. Alec has never been this clingy so he knows it definitely has something to do with his sister and brother-in-law being gone. Maybe they should start going into therapy. He’s going to look into that tomorrow while Leah’s at school and Alec is at daycare.

Soap doesn’t want to send them back yet but he knows that they have to go. They’ve missed a full week now and that’s all excused due to the death of their parents but starting tomorrow they need to be back. One piece of advice that his mom gave him was try to follow their normal routine. Get them back into the swing of things to ease the transition as best as humanely possible.

“Alec, wee yin,” He starts with humor in his tone, “I can’t make you dinner with you clinging onto me like a gremlin. Do you wanna help by setting the table for me?”

The child perks up with a nod. He smiles down at him, praising, “Thatta boy.”

He makes his way back to the living room, grabbing the rocker in the corner by the couch and setting it down in the dining room where he can see it from the other side of the breakfast bar. He puts Sophie down, buckling her in and placing the rock on gentle. Alec waits for him. He ruffles his hair as he walks past him. “Leah!” He calls.

Leah comes bounding down the stairs full speed followed by her jumping over the last two. Soap gasps. His heart had stopped for a moment there. “You can’t do that, Leah,” He says, sternly. She groans loudly.

“No,” He stops her, “None of that. Don’t do it again. Wouldn’t want you getting hurt, aye? Help your brother set the table please.”

He grabs them plates while Leah opens the drawer to get some forks. Alec takes the plates and makes his way over to the dining table. He goes through the food that his sister had, hoping that there’s still something that he can quickly make tonight. He decides making boxed

Mac and cheese is probably the best option.

After dinner, Alec and Leah show him the schedule charts his sister has hanging on the door to the basement. Soap winces upon realizing that the kids were already supposed to be in bed. Suddenly, Sophie starts screaming from the dining room.

He rushes over and finds her crying in the rocker. Scooping her up and unbuckling her, he goes to shush her by bouncing her up and down but realizes that her diaper feels suspiciously squishy. He freezes.

How the fuck do you change a diaper?

He holds her out awkwardly, looking around for the diaper bag and the other two kids start laughing loudly at his panic. Leah points to the corner where it was resting by the door. Right. After they ate, he brought it in. He grabs out all the things he needs and to his dismay, there were only two diapers left. Fuck. That's definitely not good. Looks like he'll have to run to the store after dropping the kids off tomorrow.

"Leah, Alec— Go start getting ready for bed. After you brush, go get in your pajamas and get in bed," He commands softly. Both of their laughter slowly dies out and they give him confirmation by running up the stairs.

The baby is screaming so loud he can hardly think as he follows them up. He brings Sophie to the room that he remembers being the nursery, setting her down on the changing table. He gets the wiping and everything down just fine but now can't figure out how the hell you put the diaper on.

The youngest stares up at him as he makes a confused face at the the nappy, holding it in the air and twisting it around as he observes it. He's worked in literally warzones. His career path of choice was literally assembling and deactivating bombs so this should be nothing, right?

He quickly discovers that assumption was wrong. Soap glances down at his niece's attire. It's all sideways and loose. It doesn't look right. He frowns, scratching the back of his neck. Her tiny eyes stay on him, mouth forming a small smile. Part of him is convinced she's making fun of him, although that's not possible as she's only two and a half

weeks old.

He sighs, pulling out his phone. After about twenty YouTube tutorials and more screaming, he's finally got the diaper on her. Soap smiles to himself, placing his hands on his hips as he does so. Then, quickly realizes that's the dad stance and straightens up immediately. He's not going to become Price yet.

Right. Bottle. Sophie still needs to eat. He picks her up, placing her against his chest and making sure to support her head— he's not totally clueless, thank you very much— as he goes to check on the kids. They're still in the bathroom, messing around with their toothbrushes and pretending to sword fight with them. "Hey!" He says.

Both of them jump, blue eyes wide. He motions his chin to the sink. "Brush and then bed. I'm not going to say it again." They immediately jump to action. As he's walking down the stairs, he comes to the realization that he is starting to sound like his parents and Price. It's only been one day.

Although, in his defense, after the lawyer had left and he'd informed Price on what was going on, his mother had started making him discipline the kids rather than her. So, maybe that was it.

Back in the 141, Ghost had always made jokes about him being the least mature out of all of them. As he prepares the bottle, that's all he's thinking about. Which, thank you mom for teaching him how to do that. He starts to mourn the person he was before all of this and wonders if that part of him will slowly disappear. The one always cracking jokes, pulling pranks, and bugging the hell out of his lieutenant— former lieutenant— just because it was fun.

He shakes the thought away, testing the temperature on his wrist and nodding in approval at it. Soap makes his way back up the stairs and into the nursery, sitting on the rocking chair in the corner and adjusting Sophie so that she can start to eat. "Alright, Sophie. Try not to make a mess alright. You're a messy eater just like your uncle which is why you're not in your pajamas yet," He coos at her.

She stares up at him and her lips tug up into a smile. Sophie opens and closes her mouth as she slightly raises her clenched fists. Soap's heart warms up. He places the bottle into her mouth, watching her as she eats. After a while, Alec and Leah come bounding into the room. "Are you going to tuck us in?" Leah whispers, careful not to disturb

her younger sister.

“Aye,” He affirms, “Just let me get her down and I’ll be right in.”

“Alright! I’ll be in my room playing with my dollies then!”

She skips out of the room. Alec lingers before sitting on the floor in front of him, not saying anything. He’s noticed that the only son is the quiet one amongst the three of them— Well Sophie’s a baby so he’s not sure that counts. But he wonders if that’s just his personality or if it’s a result from being in a fatal accident and losing both his parents. He’ll ring up his mother and ask tomorrow.

As he sits in the rocking chair, his exhaustion starts to settle in. It’s been a long fucking day. Already, his list for tomorrow is growing by the minute and he wonders if any of this is easier with a partner. God, he misses Ghost. Ghost probably would— No. none of that.

“Hey, Alec? You solid?” He asks, desperate for a distraction. The boy looks up at him in bewilderment. Right. Three years old. Probably doesn’t understand what the hell that means. Sophie spits up a bit and he takes away the bottle, cursing himself for not grabbing a bib. He looks around before coming to the conclusion that his shirt will have to do.

Alec watches him wipe the baby’s mouth with his shirt as he stands and grabs a bib out of one of the drawers. He mumbles his thanks to the young kid and he just nods. “I meant, are you alright?”

“Like with you,” Alec responds. He blinks. That was the first time he’s heard from the kid all day. It’s such a surprise that his voice actually almost startled him.

“I like being with you too, lad. You’re a big help, you know? Setting the table, getting a bib for me— I’m very proud of you for all of your assistance today.”

Alec beams at the praise, straightening his back. It’s quickly cut off with a yawn. Soap chuckles at that, placing Sophie’s now finished dinner on the table as he places her against his shoulder and standing. “Alright, I think it’s someone’s bed time, aye?” He directs. Alec nods sleepily.

He starts to bay and rub the infant’s back in an attempt to burp her while they walk to the three year old’s room. Please, don’t let her throw up on him. Once in there, Alec jumps onto his bed. He gets

under the covers. Soap bends down, making sure not to jostle Sophie in the process and places a kiss on his cheek. Alec sighs in content. "Good night, I love you," He murmurs.

He walks to the door as a tiny, "Love you," sounds from behind him. Soap smiles at his nephew before flicking off the light. He carefully closes the door. As he's walking down the hall Sophie lets out a loud burp and he's quite proud of himself that it only took about ten minutes to get her to do that. He's aware that sometimes it can take hours.

He keeps her there as he knocks on Leah's door then opening it. She looks up at him from her dollhouse. "Alright, wee yin, bed time. You have school tomorrow," He informs her. She says goodnight to her dolls. The girl clammers her way onto her bed, sitting up and staring at him expectantly.

As he gets closer she moves the covers from underneath of her. Soap grabs them, tucking her in with his free hand not supporting Sophie before bending down and repeating the action he had done with her brother just moments before. "Uncle John?" she says.

"What's up?"

"You're doing better than I thought you would."

He resists the urge to let out a loud laugh, opting for a quiet chuckle instead. "Gee, thanks. Glad to know you had faith in me, Leah," He replies in a jokingly sarcastic way. She giggles at that.

"Get some sleep, alright? I love you."

"Love you more."

Then he leaves the room.

—

Last night was hell. He thought that he'd be able to crash after getting Sophie to finally go to sleep but every other hour he had been getting out of bed due to her screaming through the monitor. So, when his alarm went off he had to physically drag himself out of bed to get the kids ready for the day. First, Alec got dropped off. He actually doesn't really need to go to daycare since Soap is currently unemployed but he knows that it was a part of his daily schedule so he does it anyways.

The daycare workers introduced themselves and explained what they do there. Soap felt weird about leaving his nephew in the care of someone else, tears of working in the military activating his trust issues and protective streak but he lets that go. They hand him so many pamphlets.

Afterwards Leah is dropped off. She hesitates for a bit but when he asks she just mumbles that it's nothing before abruptly leaving the car and running inside. He watches her go, unease at the interaction pricking his stomach. They'll talk about it later.

He puts the car in drive. Having a routine was the easy part. He's good at being on time and keeping on a schedule due to his former career but shopping for baby supplies? That was hell. He is standing in the baby aisle looking at the wall of diapers in front of him. Why are there so many different sizes? Which brands are good? Which are not? He looks at Sophie who's in her carrier in the cart. "Why are you so complicated? You're not even a month old."

In response, she shoves her fist in her mouth. He sighs, turning back to the wall of diapers. A woman passes him, seeing him staring at the display. She slows down herself. "You look lost," She teases.

"I am," He politely responds back, "Do you by any chance know which diapers I should buy?"

She smiles, handing her child her phone as she comes over to stand beside him. The lady peaks into the carrier. Somehow, she grins wider. "New dad?"

"Something like that."

She nods, looking around, "Where's your wife?"

He whips his head around to look at her with wide eyes probably about the size of saucers. Soap awkwardly coughs. "Nonexistent," He tells her.

"Oh," Her voice shows mild interest, "So a single new father? Recently divorced?"

He fights the urge to groan outwardly. Listen, it's not that being flirted with is the worst thing in the world and he's not even sure if that's what's going to start happening. But, he just wants to know which diapers to buy. If it was socially acceptable, he'd stomp his foot and whine. Instead he just said, "No. I'm actually her uncle. Her mother

was my sister and she recently passed so I'm new to this whole thing."

Her grin drops, sympathy replacing it. "I'm sorry for your loss. It must be hard."

He just shrugs. Now his chest aches with an old sense of grief that he doesn't allow himself to dwell on too much. He just wants these diapers. As if reading his mind, she grabs a pack for him and holds them out. He shoots her a grateful look. "Listen, if you need to talk to someone about it, I can give you my number. I'm a good listener. Maybe even give you some tips." There's a hopeful tone in her voice.

There it is. And using his dead sister as well? Cold. Real cold. "Uh," He stammers, "Thank you for the offer but I'm actually already uh—"

"Oh," She startles, cheeks flushing, "I'm sorry. That was inappropriate of me."

"It's fine it's just I'm currently interested in someone else so—"

"No, I get it."

The tension in the air is the worst kind of thick. They both stand there awkwardly as the woman's son watches YouTube loudly in the aisle. He coughs, motioning that he's going to leave and she steps aside to allow him to do so. He walks out of the aisle normally before practically sprinting to the cashiers.

Once they're heading home, he allows his mind to wander a bit. What he had told that woman wasn't a lie. He was interested in someone else. It's just that someone else was God knows where on some mission and certainly not thinking about him. Johnny would be lying if he said he doesn't miss him.

—

All Ghost can think about is Soap.

He lazily lulls his head to the side, looking at his arm that was sliced open. It bled profusely. The amount was alarming but his mind felt like jelly and he couldn't bring himself to move. Price was coming. He'd radioed him as soon as he came to after the explosion.

The debris resting on his chest was heavy but he could hardly feel it anymore at this point. Ghost was dying. He knew it.

In this moment, he was regretting not taking Price's offer to let him go join Johnny. He regretted running on this train wreck of a mission in attempt to flee from his feelings. To avoid saying goodbye to the one person he had allowed himself to be terrified to lose.

The lieutenant had convinced himself that doing it that way would cause it to hurt less. But it didn't. He had been distracted and didn't even notice the explosive device before it was too late. He closes his eyes.

A bright, flashing smile and soft blue eyes played behind his eyes. Dumb jokes. The flirting that they had done in the guise of a joke, even though sometimes it all felt a little too real.

There's so many regrets. So many things he still has to say that he never got the chance to. Maybe? Just maybe? If he makes it out alive, he'll follow his heart. A dying man's thoughts are an alive man's wishes, apparently. It's the first time in a long time that he's scared to die. Johnny had made him human again and he just let him go, taking Price a little too seriously when he had told him to.

A wetness drips from his eye and slides down his masked cheek. There's so many things he still wants. That's not true. It's not true at all. There's only one thing.

He just wants Johnny back.

Goodbyes

Chapter Summary

Ghost leaves the 141

Ghost tries to beg. He really does. When he came to, Price was sitting on the side of the cot with a sad grimace on his face. He groans, “Morning.”

“Morning, Simon,” The captain responds. Ghost just huffs out. They sit there, exchanging the regular back and forth of are you okays and yeah I’m fine. His head was pounding and his arm burned like hell. He swallows.

“Alright,” He says, “You’re not necessarily the type to sit by my bedside and watch me sleep, Price. What’s the damage?”

The captain seems to lull it over in his head, eyes shooting to the side as he purses his lips. The hesitance causes Ghost’s heart to drop. Usually Price will just tell people what’s going on or go to find one of the medbay nurses. He slams the alarm down. He’s always been good at compartmentalizing.

“Well, you sustained a cracked rib from the rubble that crushed you, blood loss and,” He sighs, “Damage to the radial nerve.”

Nerve damage.

A career ender for people like him. At

that moment a thousand thoughts are running through his head, ranging from “Why” to “How could I be so stupid.” He feels his breath start to quicken in pace. It felt as if God himself was mocking him. His last dying thoughts had been about going to Johnny and he saw that, raising him a complete life changer with no choice. He shakes his head, insisting, “I can still work.”

“Ghost—“

“I can still do anything you need me to do.”

“No,” Price shuts him down, “You can’t. You won’t be able to lift a gun for long periods of time and your aim is going to be severely off. It’s out of my hands. I’m sorry. I really am.”

Throughout the month, he'd begged Price for anything. To allow him to stay. Yet, the month passes with Price telling him the same thing over and over. The nurses test his strength. To his horror, he does struggle holding heavy objects and within ten minutes his arm starts shaking. White hot pain flashes up his arm. They tell him that it should get a bit better as time goes on but corrective surgery is for sure needed.

For obvious reasons, that won't be happening. He's a dead man. In legal standards, Simon Riley had been buried long ago so therefore the idea of waltzing into a hospital and getting surgery? Unlikely. If it wasn't for Price, he wouldn't have even been able to stay in the military.

At the end of his month long stay, once his ribs had healed and his right arm had mostly scarred over, he stands in Price's office. The old man huffed at a cigar. There were dark bags under his eyes and his lips seemed to be pressed in a permanent frown anymore. It's a huge contrast to the captain he had once known. The one that would come out to play cards with the team, loud laughter carrying throughout the room as they all argued over whether or not Gaz had been cheating. Or a night out at the bar.

Ever since Soap had left, a grief had seemed to take over the man. The life that they all knew was slipping through their fingers as if something solid had suddenly turned to liquid. Its taken a toll on him. Now, he has to say goodbye to another one of his boys. "Alright," Price grumbles as he stands, "Your stuff all packed?"

A pang of sadness eats at him. But he pushes it down with a, "Yes, sir."

Price nods, lips forming into a tight line. He steps forwards wrapping the lieutenant into a tight hug, clutching onto his the fabric on his shoulder as he does so. Ghost stands tense for a moment. Panic seeps into him at the contact but it fades away as he allows himself to melt into the feeling of comfort.

The man has always been the father that Simon wishes he had. Someone that he's always looked up to, even if he never got to say it or isn't good at expressing how he cares about people. He clings onto Price. They stay like that until the older man pulls away, tears in his eyes, "Don't be a stranger. Tell me where you're planning on going

since I can't provide a safe house for you now. I'd like to visit."

Just like Price, always worrying. Always looking out for the boys even when there's nothing he can do. Ghost coughs, trying to will away the lump in his esophagus. "I'm uh," He stammers a bit, "I'm going to Johnny."

Price smiles widely, a drop leaving his waterline as he does so. "Yeah?" He laughs wetly. If Ghost wasn't mistaken, he would say there was relief in his wavering voice.

"Affirmative. Do you happen to have his address?"

"I do," Price holds up his finger, making his way to his desk, "Give me a minute."

As the man opens a drawer, Ghost takes a moment to look around the office for the last time. He takes in the dull colored walls, the dark wooden chairs and desk, the filing cabinets, the many awards hung up, all of it. His eyes linger on the pictures of the 141 scattered around the whole area. Some are from bars or more official looking when they're right about to go on a mission. The one from right before they left to take down Makarov is in the middle of them all, Soap's mouth smiling but anxiety clear on him if you knew him well enough. He'd come back from that whole ordeal supporting a new scar that cuts through his brow and ends in the space between his eye and his cheek.

But the ones that stand out the most are the ones obviously taken from a phone camera. Soap on Ghost's shoulders with sunglasses on and tiara along with a sash across his chest that read out, "It's my birthday" in all capitals. He's sticking out his tongue with two fingers held up in a peace sign. Ghost had on his own sunglasses over his balaclava. That night Johnny had been plastered and kept on saying that he wanted a piggy back.

Ghost had given in. Of course he did. It was Johnny. Gaz was practically pissing himself as he howled in laughter at them and Price had begged to get a picture. Moments after it was taken, they lost balance and fell backwards over the concrete bench behind them, falling into some shrubs. He was picking twigs out of his balaclava for days after that. A small smile tugs at the corner of his lip at the memory.

Price snaps him out of his thoughts as he comes back around, handing him a small piece of paper with an address written on it. He stares at

it way longer than necessary. A longing pulls at his heart along with some solace that he'll be seeing Johnny again. That it wasn't the end.

"Bring him a gift. I'm sure you're in the doghouse for not saying goodbye, mate," Price says, clapping a hand on his shoulder. Ghost looks up, brows furrowed.

"What?"

"You went on a mission instead of saying goodbye, which the universe seemed to deliver karma to you for as that was the one that ended your career. Doesn't mean it'll make it right with him, though."

"I'm not following."

Price moans loudly at that. He brings his hand up to punch at the bridge of his nose between his eyes. He takes a deep breath. Then, he looks back at him saying slowly, "When he decided to leave, you went on a mission instead of saying goodbye to him. Now, I know you did that because you are an emotionally stunted man and can't handle your own feelings for the life of you. Literally for the life of you. You almost fucking bled to death. But, Soap doesn't know that.

"So... before you come knocking on his doorstep and asking to stay with him— Since I know you're not going to confess your feelings for him yet but I have faith you'll get there— Bring him a bloody gift. Or, come up with a pretty damn good apology because he's been raising three kids, the oldest being only five, by himself for the past month now and is probably already pent up enough with frustration that he knows he can't get out."

Ghost blinks, shocked at the rambling. Price gives him advice, sure. But he never dives this deep into it because he's usually able to understand pretty quickly what he's done wrong. He does now too. But this was obviously important.

"Simon," Price continues, "There are kids involved now. If you're going to go there all the way to Scotland and be by his side, he's going to need you two to be on the same page. There needs to be trust. It's not just him anymore. There's children involved and that's a serious commitment. You're not just going to be with him, you're going to put yourself in a position to be their caretaker as well. That means work on your communication skills while you're on the way."

Be with him. Not just live with him. Be with him. He's also hinting at Ghost being a potential parental figure to the three kids by Johnny's

side. It does cause a bit of panic to rise up in his chest, the idea of raising kids. He never thought that was his future. Bringing up children as the person he had become felt way too dangerously close to being the man his father was. Sure, he'd never hurt a child like he did. But there is an anger in him that hasn't left him and he's afraid of how that will translate as a parent.

What is he thinking? He's not going to Scotland to immediately hop into a relationship with Johnny. He just... wants to see him again. Maybe start there until he gets on his own two feet. Sure, he's not going to say he doesn't have feelings for the man or that when he was dying, that wasn't one of the only things he thought about. But that doesn't mean anything.

There's a high chance that Johnny doesn't feel the same. In all honesty, look at Ghost. He's so not worth a man like him and if Soap does like men, he probably sees that. Someone like him is not someone that you fall in love with.

But Johnny is his closest friend. So of course when he has nowhere to go, that's where he'll run. It's nothing else. Right? "Price, it's not—" He goes to explain this to his captain, more to convince himself than to convince him but Price holds up his hand. It silences him.

"I wasn't born yesterday, son. I can see how you feel about him. Gaz can see how you feel about him. Bloody hell, the whole base can see it. Why do you think Soap never got asked out his entire time here? Do you really think that no one here was interested in him? They were too scared of you to actually act on any feelings because they knew you two belonged to each other, even if either of you don't know it yet. Bloody hell, I know I wouldn't want to be the poor bastard that tries to steal 'Johnny' from you."

Ghost swallows but dryness in his throat doesn't go away after. He admits that hearing that people didn't dare act on their attraction to the former sergeant because of him pleases the possessive streak he has in him. That they considered him as someone that belongs to Ghost. It pleases him just as much that people thought the same about him belonging to Johnny.

This conversation should scare him. It should send him running for the hills and deciding he'll just become an off-the-grid recluse like originally planned before the mohawked man came crashing into his life. But it doesn't. Instead, Ghost finds himself hanging on to every word and placing it in his brain with a big stamp that says,

“Important.”

“Copy that, captain,” He says, holding out his hand, “I’ll have Johnny send you my number once I get myself a phone. As you said to him, we’ll always be a part of each other’s lives, even if you’re not our superior. I’d like it to stay that way.”

Price smiles gripping his hand and shaking it, “It’s been a pleasure to work with you, Lieutenant Riley.”

“As it was to work with you, Price.”

He picks up the bags on the floor and makes his way to the door. As he opens it, he lingers in the doorway and takes in the office again. He walks nods once to the man that provided him so much more than he could ever give back and leaves.

Kyle is waiting for him by the car that’s going to take him to the station. He also hugs him but it’s a lot shorter and less emotional than the one Price has given him. It’s still just as meaningful though. “So,” Gaz says, “Where is the Ghost going now that his time as a civilian has finally come?”

Ghost opens the car door, looking back at the sergeant. He smiles under the balaclava. “To Johnny,” He informs before saluting and getting in.

We Only Part To Meet Again

Chapter Summary

Ghost and Soap find their way back to another. Soap has an important conversation with Leah.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He's in hell. Soap has officially died and went to hell.

For the past week, Sophie has been none stop crying. No matter what he did, the now one moth old just wouldn't quit. Sometimes, at night when she's not crying he'll dream that she is and he'll shoot up out of bed, tripping to her room while half asleep only to find her sleeping peacefully.

He had been in the middle of making sandwiches for the children along with a bottle for Sophie. The house was total chaos. Both Alec and Leah were running around screaming as they played together. He's asked them multiple times to stop because Sophie was finally asleep after being up all last night crying.

A gasp echoes against the walls followed by wailing of a three year old. He sighs, placing the knife onto the counter as he closes his eyes, letting out a quiet and broken, "Please."

No other crying comes. He thanks the universe that the two hadn't woken up Sophie. He breathes in through his nostrils to calm the growing impatience bubbling inside of him, not wanting to snap at them. Soap told them millions of times to stop. That their sister is sleeping and he didn't want to move her from her rocker to her crib in fear that she'll wake up. He opens his mouth to scold them but then—

"Why so mean, Leah?" Alec screams at the top of his lungs. The sound of a struggle from the living room and the little tell tale whimpering fills his ears.

"Sophie, please," He whispers, "Don't."

As if she heard his pleading she starts wailing at the top of her lungs again. Soap has never felt so defeated in his life. He wants to scream, cry, and punch things. That however would not be helpful to anyone

and would only scare the children. He opts to pull at his now borderline mullet mohawk to the point where his hands shake before he runs the flat palms over the top of his exhausted eyes. He then drags down his hands to cover his whole face.

He resists the urge to yell again. Soap walks around the wall and staircase, coming into the living room. The toddler and the child were both yanking on a dinosaur toy. Over the past month, Leah has sort of started to become somewhat of a bully to her younger brother. Her therapist says that whatever's causing the reaction, she's refusing to talk about and completely shuts down whenever it's brought up.

He's trying to remain patient with her but it's starting to get tough. He doesn't want Alec to be afraid of his own sister but he also doesn't want to be too harsh on Leah in case this is some type of trauma response.

There was a loud knocking on the door. All three children were crying for their own reasons and Soap felt as if he'd lose his mind at any moment. It was so overwhelming. Somehow, war felt easier than this. "Leah, give your brother back his toy," He commands softly, picking up Sophie from her rocker.

Leah yells out, "But I want it!"

"Yes," Soap says, making his way to the door, "I understand but you snatched it from his hands. You have plenty of other toys you can play with."

"No! I want this one."

Alec sobs louder and Soap's head feels like it's about to explode. Sophie needs to get fed, he's aware. She's also so exhausted. But right now so much is going on. How the hell did his sister do this?

"Leah-" He's cut off as he trips over a Lego set. He starts hopping on one foot, just inches from the door and has to bite his lips to stop himself from cursing. Sophie screams at the top of her lungs.

"I know," He coos, "I'm sorry. I'll get you fed in a moment."

He adjusts her and throws open the door. On the other side is the last person he'd ever expect to see. After he'd left the military, he'd accepted that this was the end of their friendship. Yet, Simon Riley is standing on the other side of the door. Balaclava and all.

Upon hearing the chaos, the man's brown eyes widen about ten times their usual size and once upon a time ago, Soap would've laughed so hard he'd fall off his seat. But current Soap is depleted. So he just bounces Sophie and says incredulously, "Ghost?"

The lieutenant shifts on his own foot awkwardly, now avoiding eye contact with him. Part of Soap feels relieved to see Simon, excited even. Another part of him wants to tackle him to the ground and ask if their friendship meant nothing to him considering he had run off on a solo mission instead of saying goodbye to his field partner. Maybe for the last time.

"Hey Johnny, can I come in? If it's not too much trouble that is—"

Soap doesn't let him finish, just turns around with a hand motion for him to follow. He hears the door shut behind him as the tall man awkwardly follows him through the house, the sounds of three children bawling still echoing throughout the house. Great first impressions, guys. He takes a bottle out of the fridge, bouncing Sophie as he does so, "Shh, I know. You're hungry and tired. It's coming I promise."

Ghost stands off to the side by the dinner table, watching him with calculating eyes just as he had done watching him during training sessions when he was still his lieutenant. He places the bottle in the warmer as he covers Sophie's ear to shield her before he calls out, "Bring the toy in here."

There's no real anger in his voice, just desperation. He listens as the fighting stops. Two kids come around the corner with guilty looks on their faces, knowing they had woken up their baby sister.

"Sorry, Uncle John," Leah apologizes, looking down at the toy in her fist before back up at him. Sophie still cries in his ear but he's so used to the sound at this point that the drilling of it into his brain doesn't make panic or get overwhelmed by that alone like it used to. No, it's when the older two are fighting, Sophie's screeching, he's trying to make lunch and a bottle, and then there's his old coworker knocking on his door... That's when he starts to lose it quite a bit.

He holds out the palm of his hand. Leah shuffles forwards, gently placing it into it. He nods at her, "Thank you. We're going to talk about this after lunch and after that, I want to talk to you specifically, Leah."

The bottle warmer goes off and he turns to grab it out of its holder.

He still needs to test it. Fuck. He goes to put a crying Sophie back into her rocker but is surprised to see Ghost standing behind him. "Steamin' Jesus," He startles, "Forgot you did that."

He pries the bottle from Soap's hand and motions back towards the kids who were standing there staring at the tall man in shock. Oh right. That's a total stranger to them. Ghost swirls the drinking device in a circular motion before he tilts it and lets a drop of milk fall onto his exposed wrist, taking a moment. He nods. Soap rests a hand on his arm to show thanks.

Ghost looks down at the motion, sadness but also another feeling shining deep into those eyes of his. He takes the bottle back, nudging his chin in the direction of the two little ones frozen in place. They make their way over to the dining area again causing both the kids to step back, staring up at Ghost.

Soap cocks his head to the side in confusion of the alarm on their faces. He takes a look at Ghost. It clicks. Robbers wear black masks on that movie they had snuck on last week after he told them specifically not to. They think he's here to rob them. Soap does laugh then, shifting Sophie in his arms and staring to feed her. He almost cries at the silence that follows.

The man looks back him, seeming more scared than the kids. He shakes his head as Alec slowly gets behind his older sister, hoping she'll shield them both from their "robber." Ghost turns back. Soap starts to go around him, whispering teasingly into his ear, "The mask. Take it off."

It's meant to be a joke, really. Though that is what's scaring the siblings, he'd never make him do that. Realistically, he could tell them that it's okay and Ghost wasn't here to hurt him. But he was enjoying the view of him for once not knowing what to do. He feels guilt for that.

The rage towards Ghost is misplaced. It started happening after life had slowly gotten harder and harder for him. Other times, he understands that the lieutenant will run from anything to do with emotions or sentiments— It's just who he is. Johnny had learned not to take it personal.

But right now, everything felt personal and he was constantly angry. Angry at the world for taking his sister and her husband, angry at his career gone in the blink of an eye, angry at himself for not doing well

enough for his nieces and nephews.

His mind comes to a screeching halt as Ghost haphazardly pulls off the mask, holding up his hands in mock surrender. Gently, he soothes, "It's alright. I'm not here to hurt you." The blond smiles down at the children and their fear turns to curiosity as Alec peaks out from behind Leah.

Soap's heart stops in that silly way it had done a month ago before everything had gone to shit. It skips a beat. Two. Then continues on ten times faster at the sight of him slowly crouching down to the kid's height and holding out his hand. "I'm Simon," He greets, smirk getting wider. That's it. That was the death of him. Here lies John "Johnny-Soap" Mactavish. Cause of death: Simon Riley being gentle with his children.

Leah steps forward, placing her tiny hand around his fingers. She cautiously says, "Leah. This is Alec and that's Sophie over there."

Simon nods, "Well, it's nice to meet you all. I'm a friend of your uncles."

Friend. He said friend. Not colleague. Friend. Any resentment that he has been feeling towards Ghost was dissolving within minutes, as a weird feeling of calm set over him. A heat climbs up his neck and onto his cheeks. He swallows, looking down at Sophie before watching the scene play out again.

"From the military?" Alec exclaims, bouncing out from behind his sister to grab at Ghost's arm. That reminds him of why he had let the man into the house in the first place. He hums in confirmation at the little boy.

He tilts the bottle out of Sophie's mouth to wipe off some spit up before placing her into the burping position, patting her back as she lifts her head every couple of moments to stare around the room until the weight is too much to hold up. "Hey, you two. Why don't you go clean up your toys in the living room and let me and uh— Simon— talk for a while? I'll have lunch ready soon."

Ghost looks over at him. The smile remains on his face, causing Soap's heart to go haywire again. The lieutenant tells the kids, "Go on." They nod at him before running off into the living room. Now there's just them and the baby. The men stare, neither saying anything to the other as Johnny sits there trying to burp a baby while Simon seems to be hesitating, big time.

He's not used to the nervous energy that's portrayed on the blond right now. Sure on missions there would be time when his voice would waver or his brown orbs danced around in paranoia but all they were doing was existing in each others spaces.

He really hopes Simon isn't here to try and bring him back. It won't work. Sure, he's the most tired he's ever been and right now things are pretty downright miserable but he loves these kids. He's only had them for one month but he could never picture leaving them.

"They all look so much like you," Ghost comments.

"Aye," Soap grins tiredly, "Them Mactavish genes are strong. They actually look like my sister, technically speaking. We practically were twins growing up. Only nine months apart in age too. Well, we were nine months apart in age."

Ghost searches his features again, mouth forming into a tight line as he does so, as if he was saddened by something he saw on the Scot. It's weird, seeing his facial reactions. If he were more awake, he'd certainly be way more interested in studying his face until his eyes wouldn't let him anymore. "Nine month, huh? Your parents were getting busy it seems—"

"Simon, for the love of God. Don't put that image in my head, please."

Simon chuckles, making his way over to him and Soap's mesmerized by the way his lips look when he's laughing. He almost doesn't notice the taller man holding out his arms. Soap blinks.

"Go finish lunch, Johnny," Ghost hums, "I'll burp Sophie for you."

Soap stands, squinting at him slightly. Sure, things are patchy right now between them if the awkward, nervous vibe is anything to go off of. But he still trusts him with his life. So, therefore trusts him with the kids. Besides, he could use the help even if it's temporary. After handing the baby over Soap walks to the abandoned peanut butter and jellies. Ghost follows behind.

He can feel eyes burrowing into his soul, even if he's not facing the person doing it. Might as well rip the bandaid off. "I'm surprised to see you. Thought I'd never see you again after I left. Speaking of which, in all due respect, sir, if you're here to try to convince me to come back; don't. I have three kids to take care of right now and I'm not leaving them."

"Good thing I'm not then."

Soap slathers the peanut butter on the bread in his hand, swiveling his head to glance at Ghost with confusion. "You're not?"

"No, Johnny," He blinks slow before smirking, "I'm not."

Johnny raises an eyebrow at him, slowly focusing his attention to the bread again. Then why was he here? There's no reason for him to be here, maskless, and holding his former teammate's child in his arms. So what gives? "Then, care to tell me why you're here? Because I'm kinda in the dark here, Lt.."

Ghost sighs from behind him. Heavy footsteps make their way over to him before he's leaning his back on the counter directly next to Soap. Once Sophie sees him, she grins a gummy grin at him as he makes numerous happy faces at her. She keeps trying to lift her head to track his movements but isn't able to hold it up long enough. Still it's good that she's starting to lift her head at all.

Then it dawns on him. Ghost is holding her on his left side rather than his right, which is his more dominant and preferred side. Soap furrows his eyebrows together. "Why are you supporting most of her weight with your left side. Aren't you right handed?"

Ghost goes pale, which is amazing considering how pale he already is. There was a major shift in the room as soon as the question had left his mouth and he's trying to desperately put it together in his mind but can't because his brain feels like sludge. It's heavy and it's thick. Nothings coming out of it.

"Johnny," Ghost starts, "I have some things I came to talk to you about. I want to make it perfectly clear that behind the apology I'm going to give you isn't some manipulative tactic because I need a favor. I'm genuine. Price called me out on some things before i left and it made me realize that my actions matter to people other than me. They matter to you."

Johnny timidly places the sandwiches together. Afterwards, he turns to rest his hip against the counter, fully facing the lieutenant. This was the most he's heard from Ghost ever. Still he motions for him to go on, patiently waiting as taught to him this past month via three children. The other man stares at him in shock.

"You're going to need to cut me off by bloody cursing at me and being stubborn or something because I don't know what you've done with

my Johnny but you're not him," The other man jokes.

But Soap didn't laugh. Instead his brain had cling onto "my Johnny." It keep repeating in his head. His Johnny. *His.*

He knew his whole face was most likely bright red if his hot and flustered he suddenly felt was an indicator. He opened and closed his mouth repeatedly. Any words that tried to form, died quickly. The man next to him suddenly gets a smug look across his scarred face as he mumbles, "Ah, Never mind. There he is."

"Awa' n bile yer heid, ye fuckin spooky bitch," Soap responds, cheeks somehow growing in temperature again as he turns to cut the sandwiches. As he does so, he continues to grumble more curses and such under his breath. He sneaks a glance at Simon, almost jumping at the softness that radiated off of him as he listened to the Scot ramble.

"Enough of that," He coughs, "I just want to say I'm sorry. I shouldn't have went on that solo mission instead of taking the chance of saying seeing you for possibly the last time ever. It's nothing personal. I promise. That doesn't make it better. I know. It's just... I've been alone for a long time with no one but myself to worry about protecting with my personal actions.

"On the field it's different than when it's my own... Sometimes, I tend to flee when things go wrong. I'll disappear. I should've been more supportive and I should've been there. It was selfish, even if that wasn't entirely my intention, it was. I'm sorry if I hurt you or made you think I didn't care because I did. I do."

Soap listens to every word, clinging onto them as if they were life rafts while he was trying desperately trying to keep his head above water. He says back, "I knew it wasn't personal. Part of me did. Still, there was that louder part that figured that our friendship was one sided after all. But now you're here in my fucking kitchen with a huge heartfelt apology and I don't know what to think."

Ghost chuckles, readjusting Sophie before returning to patting her back for her to burp in hopes that she want be too upset later. Soap smiles at him, "Sucks that you're impossible to stay mad at, you know?"

"I know," Ghost responds back cockily. Johnny sighs. He waits for the man to continue on with whatever else he was going to say. However, Sophie burps and the man pulls her away from his shoulder, smiling at her. "That was a loud one," He praises, "Good burp. Let's get you to

sleep now, right?"

Sophie responds by sticking her tongue out at him before yawning, causing Ghost to grow impossibly softer at the action. He places her in the rocker then comes back. He shucks off his jacket, saying, "If it makes you feel any better, I got discharged."

Soap almost died of shock. "What?" He asks.

"Yeah," Ghost mumbles, face falling to a frown as he pulls up his sleeve to show a long gash up his arm that was obviously starting to scar. The Scot pushes himself off the counter, placing gentle hands around the limb as he observes it. "Nerve damage," He informs.

Soap looks up at him. He sees the dejectedness as the former lieutenant grimaces, as if the words had hurt him. The idea of of him never going back to military is almost more foreign than when he himself realized he'd never go back. There was one night where they were all playing cards and had somehow gotten onto the topic on how the 141 members though they were going to die.

"On the field," Ghost had stated confidently. No one questioned the answer, all knowing that he'd refuse to leave the job any other way. No matter how bad it hurt them. Yet, here he is. He left in a different way.

"You solid?" Soap questions, taking his hands off. The taller man exhales before nodding. At the same time, their eyes meet and a silent conversation seems to be passing between them. They're both very much not okay but something tells them that they'll get through this time in their lives. Together.

"Is it alright," Ghost swallows, "If I stay with you? Just until I'm ready I find a job that'll hire me under the table and I can get my own place. It's okay if not. But either way, I want us to be alright. No matter how long it takes. You're my best friend. We've been through hell and back together multiple times now. So no matter what, I plan to stay here in Scotland at least. If you need time to think—"

"You stay here as long as you want," Soap cuts him off. The anxiety fades off of the blond as he nods in confirmation at his former sergeant. The world around them blurs, leaving the two in the kitchen being each other's only focus. Johnny passes him an easy smile.

"Careful, sergeant. Might just take you up on that offer," Ghost responds. The air condenses at that statement, leaving the Scot's

throat dry.

“Aye. But I’m not a sergeant anymore, sir.”

“That you aren’t and I’m not your superior, I suppose.”

“Correct.”

Ghost’s eyes trail down to Soap’s lips. It was only for a quick millisecond though and he wasn’t paying such close attention to him, Johnny would’ve missed the movement. His heart and mind were racing simultaneously. Did he want this too? Are these feelings unrequited? It could be so easy to just lean in, asking him to stay forever with a searing kiss rather than words.

But the moment is ruined, “But what you are, is a parent to two hungry kids that are peaking around the wall at us.”

Soap whips around just as the children try to launch themselves into back into hiding. He chuckles, “That I am. You go get your stuff while I’m talking to them. There’s an extra bedroom at the end of the hall upstairs. It’s all yours.”

“Rog,” He responds, stepping away. As he walks out, the kids come into the dining room with false innocent looks on their faces. He sighs, grabbing the plates and placing them onto the table which causing the kids to run to their seats.

As they begin eating, Soap sits down. “Alright. You two need to learn how to share, okay? Especially you, Leah. What you did was not okay. Apologize to your brother, please. We communicate in this household and you two need to work on your issues with each other.”

Leah chews on her sandwich. Her blue eyes glued to her lap as her little brother faces her, expectant. She puts down her food and faces him head on. Her face was nothing but sincere regret. “I’m sorry, Alec. You were playing with it and I should’ve asked.”

“It okay,” Alec responds, voice small, “I love you. No being mean. I not mean to you.”

The rest of the lunch is silent as the two eat. Once they’re both finished, Leah takes Alec’s plate before Soap can even start to stand up and runs to the kitchen to rinse them off. Ghost comes back in as she sits back down. “Okay, Alec. I’d like to talk to Leah alone. Why don’t you go play?”

Alec looks like he's about to protest immediately, probably in some attempt to defend the older one of them. But Leah's not in any more trouble. They just need to talk about some things going on. But before it happens, Ghost steps forwards while extending an open palm, "Come on. Let's go outside for a little. I'll teach you how to play football."

Alec looks between the three others in the room around him, pursing his lips. Meanwhile, Soap is secretly thanking Ghost in his mind as he juts his chin over to the blond with a serious look on his face. The three year old stands, clumsily rushing over to Simon. He picks him up.

Once they're gone, Johnny turns his attention back to Leah. "You're not in trouble," He comforts, "But we do need to have a chat about how you've been behaving. I don't know what's going on, other than the usual, or why you're refusing to open up about it but at this point, you're being very mean to your little brother. Just last week you shoved him to the floor for no reason and you've never done that before."

Leah nods. She holds eye contact with him as he speaks, showing she's listening. "You're so much bigger than him, Leah," He continues, "It's not fair. Imagine if I came up to you and snatch a toy out of your hand or shoved you around. How would you feel?"

A distant look forms in her eyes. Soap decides then, that something is certainly off with her and he doesn't like it one bit. "Scared," She whispers, guilt on her face as she looks up at him again.

"Exactly. Don't you think that's how he feels? I don't want violence in this house, Leah and I know you don't either. Your brother loves you and trusts you wholeheartedly. You don't want to break that trust. He even said it, he doesn't like it when you're mean to him. Sure, not in as many words because he's three but it was still said.

"I know you're going through a tough time right now, believe me. I couldn't even begin to imagine the pain you must be feeling but it's not right to take it out on him. He's not the one that hurt you. But something tells me that more is going on than you're letting on and you can't let that eat up inside, whatever it is. You need to tell someone. It doesn't have to be me or your therapist, although she'd probably give you the best advice, but it needs to be someone. Bottled up emotions tend to come out one way or another, whether you like it or not."

She says, "I understand, Uncle John. I'm sorry."

"It's alright. We all have moments that we're not proud of, that's just life. Wanna tell me what's going on?"

She shakes her head in refusal. Dammit. Soap feels like he messed this up somewhere. He desperately wants to know what's going on with her but he's not going to force her to tell him yet. If this continues, he'll have to push. He's going to try and see if her therapist could maybe nudge her somehow into opening up, that way at least someone will know what's going on.

He stands, walking over to her and crouching in front of her. She doesn't look at her so he tilts her chin so that their eyes will meet. "Hey," He murmurs, "You're an amazing kid. You're kind, smart, funny, headstrong— We all mess up sometimes but I want you to know that I don't think any less of you for your actions lately. You're still a great person. We all just have to live and learn sometimes, alright?"

Tears fill her eyes. "I'm not bad?" She whimpers. Johnny's heart breaks at that moment as he scoops her up into a hug. She breaks down in his arms. He squeezes her tighter, but gently enough so it doesn't hurt her.

"God, no, Leah," He soothes, "Never. There's not a bad bone in your body, Leah. You're so good. You mean the world and more to everyone around you, alright? I love you so much."

She nods. Soap continues to hold her, telling her all of her great qualities as she sobs quietly in his arms while he rubs comforting circles on her back. They stay that way until the five year old pulls away and he reaches out to wipe the excess moisture from her waterline with his thumb. He then grabs her shoulders, saying, "Repeat after me. I'm strong, I'm beautiful, and I'm kind."

She sniffles out, "I'm strong, I'm beautiful, and I'm kind."

"I'm not the bad things I do but how I choose to do better after."

"I'm not the bad things I do but how I choose to do better after."

He nods, continuing, "I'm strong, I'm beautiful, and I'm kind."

"I'm strong, I'm beautiful, and I'm kind."

He smiles, before praising, “Good. Whenever you feel bad about yourself or the things that you do, I want you repeat that exact thing to yourself in your head. Especially the compliments. How you view yourself is important and I want you to know how great you are, even if your actions at that moment aren’t. Always be nice to yourself and be nice to others.”

After they go over the saying a couple of more times, Soap takes her and a now awake Sophie to the living room. He’s unsure of why the little one woke up but at least she’s not driving him mad by crying. He lets her pick out her favorite movie before placing the infant onto her tummy time mat, sitting down next to her just in case she needs him.

The boys come in, covered in dirt and Simon and Soap switch places so that he can give Alec a bath. When they come back, Johnny’s knees almost collapse at the sight he sees.

Leah is pressed up against Ghost’s side on the floor as she explains the movie to him in great detail while he acts like he’s confused. He asks her purposely dense questions, causing her to groan at him before retelling him. Soap’s heart swells.

“Solid?” Alex asks Johnny.

He laughs at the kid attempting to use that lingo. He brings his hand up to ruffle his now damp hair with a, “Yeah, wee yin. I’m alright. Why don’t you go watch the movie. I need to go make Simon take a shower. He stinks.”

Alec bounds over, sitting next to his older sister. He scrunches up his nose dramatically before saying, “Simon, you stink.”

Soap leans against the entryway, the corner of his lips practically up to his eyes as the tiredness fades from him. Instead in its place is content. Ghost looks at the boy with mock hurt on his face and maybe just for a moment he allows himself to think that this is their family rather than what it really is.

Chapter End Notes

I Hope you enjoyed this chapter. Please let me know what you think in the comments. I love when y’all comment, it gives me inspiration to continue :)

Coparenting

Chapter Summary

Simon makes sure that Johnny gets some much needed rest. Flirtatious moms strike again and Soap is as observant as ever to people being attracted to him. Well, all except one person. There he can't be helped until he figures

Chapter Notes

Apparently chapters are going to start getting longer now. The end of this might be bleh. I wrote it instead of sleeping like every ao3 author ever

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Simon woke up to the sound of wailing. Which was a normal feat for him, considering his life both in the military and before. He hurtles into a sitting position, the knife he keeps under the pillow fastened in his hand. As soon as he realizes where he is and that he's not in any sort of danger, he sighs before rubbing a hand over his face.

It was just Sophie. He's at Johnny's. There's no danger. Everything is alright. Everyone is safe.

His brain reminds him of those things over and over again as he shuffles his way out of the room to down the hall where the infants room is. The sight causes him to freeze at the doorway. The room was a completely disaster. There was a pacifier on the floor, all of the changing table drawers were wide open, and a bottle was knocked over on the nightstand. The only light in the room was from the butterfly nightlights on the pink wall.

Johnny stood in the middle of the room, not even noticing the the newcomer despite the years upon years of military training that they both had experienced with the expectation of being able to be aware of their surroundings. In his arm was Sophie screaming at the top of her lungs. Under the eyes of the man weren't just dark, they were bordering on the edge of looking like the face paint that Simon used to wear. He was trying to shush the baby, bouncing her.

The blue eyes that were usually full of so much light were half lidded and misty. Tears stains were on his cheeks. Now, the former lieutenant has never seen him cry. Not once. Well, that's a lie actually. He did

when he got the news that his sister had passed. They've been through the worst possible things you could imagine but Johnny's resolve never faltered. He liked to act strategically with a cool head, thinking that panic would only make the situation worse. "Sophie," He begged, "Sophie. Please, m'eduaile. You're alright, just go to sleep."

At the end of the sentence, his voice shook violently as he squeezed shut his eyelids. Simon's heart breaks. If he had known that he was this tired, he would've done something to make it better earlier. He distantly wonders how much help that Johnny has asked for. Knowing him, probably none. The Scot was stubborn like that. They were alike that way. The blond steps forwards, "Johnny."

Soap turns. The man snuffles, before steadying his voice while saying, "Did she wake you up? I'm sorry. I'm trying to get her back to sleep but it's not working out too well. Go back to bed. I'll try to quiet her down."

"Negative," Simon responds, crossing the room. He places a comforting hand on his back. Another stray tear falls. He remembers nights like this with Joseph and the breakdowns that both Beth and Tommy would have during it. It was only every once in a while, but it seems as if this has been going on for a bit with Sophie.

"How much sleep are you getting?" He asks the shorter man.

"Probably about 14 hours a week as of recent."

"Johnny..." His tone was disappointed but gentle, not wanting to add to his stress at the moment. Soap gulps. He breaks away from the hand on his back. It's an attempt to keep that final strength and both of them damn well know it. Simon frowns. The brunet faces him. He's about to say something but Johnny beats him to it.

"I don't know what's wrong. She's been like this for two weeks now. No matter what I do she just..." He starts, spreading out the next words like they were their own sentence themselves, "...won't stop crying. I'm fucking this whole thing up and she's not even one year old. I'm so tired. I know she is too. She only gets about one hour before she's screaming again and I feel like I'm losing my mind."

Johnny is heaving now, taking the free hand and tugging at his now overgrown mohawk aggressively. He's breaking. Simon walks to him, taking the baby. "It's probably just colic. We'll schedule a doctor's appointment tomorrow to be sure."

He cradles Sophie, making sure her head was resting on his chest where she could hear his heartbeat as he delicately massages her stomach to hopefully ease some tension. He mumbles, "It happens for a multitude of reasons, although they think it has to do with gas and the digestive track most likely. Do me a favor and run a warm bath please? That might help calm her down and soothe any aches if it is colic."

Soap's eyes widen. He nods, rushing out of the room. A couple of moments later he hears the tell tale sound of the baby tub being placed in the bath, along with the running of water. Meanwhile, Simon tries his best to soothe the screaming child while opening the dresser and grabbing a new pair of pajamas, not wanting to put her in dirty ones after her bath. He makes his way into the bathroom, finding Johnny kneeled by the tub, half asleep. His heart breaks a bit more.

Price was right. Just as the captain always was. Soap was different and he was exhausted. The contrast in him doesn't change a thing about what Simon thinks of him, except maybe that he's stronger for doing this all on his own for as long as he has. The blond places a hand on his shoulder, shaking him lightly.

Johnny startles awake. He relaxes once he sees that Simon is standing there and moves to sit on the toilet instead. He wants to ask him to go to sleep. That he has this. But he knows how protective the man can get over the things he cares about, especially the people. The poor recruit that once cursed out Gaz had learned a lesson from the sergeant that day.

Simon doesn't take it personally. They have a deep understanding of each other as people. It doesn't mean Johnny trusts him any less, he knows this. He doesn't think that the taller man would accidentally drown the baby or anything, it just would provide him some peace of mind to be there during her tiny tantrum while Simon bathes her.

Once the baby is undressed, he places her in the warm bath and carefully pours the warm water on her with a cup. He hums slightly. Eventually she starts calm and Soap lets out a relieved sigh at the silence. They take her out, drying her off. Once back in the room, he places her on the changing table and puts on her new pajamas while Johnny stands off to the side.

He keeps a hand on her to make sure she stays secure as he looks in the changing table drawers for something to swaddle her with. He smiles when he finds it. As he stands up straight again, the eyes of

both Mactavish family members bore into him. Simon starts to swaddle the infant.

“What are you doing?” Johnny asks.

“Swaddling her. It helps comfort them.”

“Swaddling?”

Simon pauses, pursing his lips. He then motions with his head for Johnny to get closer. “C’mere,” He says, “I’ll show you how.”

The other man pushes himself off of the door frame, moving in closer to get a better look. He goes through the steps on how to do the action, slowly due to the fact that he knows Soap is exhausted. Once it’s done, he cradles her again. He makes his way to rocking chair, still humming as he does so before sitting down. He rocks gently.

Soap stands where he left him, eyes incredibly soft. Once Sophie is for sure asleep, he whispers, “You’re really good at this, Lt.”

“Not my first rodeo. After Joseph was born, Beth made us all read countless parenting books. Something about if we’re going to watch him, then we’re going to need to know what we’re doing.” Simon slightly chuckles, “That was a long time ago. I don’t remember the exact words now but...”

Johnny tilts his head slightly at the names. That’s right. He’s never heard about any members of his family before and a month ago, Ghost would kick himself for letting it slip out of his mouth? Now though? As he looks down at the sleeping Sophie? It feels a bit different.

Price had told him his communication needs to be better if he wants to help and relieve some stress off of the former sergeant. Simon was more than willing. The things that he was willing to do for Johnny sometimes scared him, knowing that if anything ever happened to him he’d turn into something that he’d never bounce back from. His time in the military is over. Not necessarily in the way originally planned but that’s okay. This is better.

It needs to work.

Even if they stay nothing but friends for as long as they live, he’ll be fine with that. Simon never wants to make him any forms of uncomfortable by telling him his own feelings even if it kills him inside. Because Johnny doesn’t deserve it. If he doesn’t feel the same

then he'll feel guilty. Simon knows he will. Things would get awkward between them and they'll drift farther and farther apart. He can't lose him.

So he'll take what he can get. Will never complain. Not even once.

Johnny saved Simon from a life as Ghost. Not just that— He saved him from dying as Ghost. If he wasn't around, he's sure that he would've died on that field a month ago without anything to cling onto. Sure, he was a good soldier. So much so that he was more of myth amongst men lower than him in the ranks. Stories would spread about the elusive Ghost.

But being a good soldier wasn't something worth living for, entirely. Not when he's lost as much as he's had in his lifetime. There will always be another Ghost some day. Maybe not by that callsign but there will be someone just as good. However, Johnny had somehow got into his head that there will never be another Simon. At least, not to him. No matter what they are: he knows Johnny holds him close to his heart. Whether it's in a platonic or a romantic way; that doesn't matter. All that matters is he gets to keep it.

Even as Johnny changes with his impromptu fatherhood, Simon will always see him as that sergeant on the tarmac that hit his shoulder with a promise to save him a seat. As the person that stuck by him during the whole Graves and Shepherd betrayal mess. The one that saw him, the good and the bad, and decided to befriend him anyways.

The first person who saw him human when he was Ghost, instead of trying to make him human. He had already known that Ghost was Simon deep down; not that Ghost *could be* Simon. They were the same being in Johnny's mind. The sergeant had seen past the façade of the mask, knowing that's all it was. A mask. More of a shield. That Simon was everything that Ghost was, just hidden.

Once he realizes he's been quiet for a bit, he explains, "Beth was my sister-in-law. Joseph was my nephew."

"Was?"

"Didn't really think I still had family, did you, Johnny?" He questions, genuinely. He makes sure that his face is void of any harshness when he says it, hoping that he will see the observation didn't hurt him. Johnny shakes his head, a sad look in his eyes.

"No," Soap honestly answers, "I was kind of hoping I was wrong,

though. What happened?"

Now that would cause him to spiral. He gives the Scot a desperate look. It was a pleading for him not to make him unpack that whole trauma tonight. He gets a sympathetic smile back along with a slight nod. Simon could've kissed him for that. He chooses not to.

Johnny yawns, reminding the former lieutenant just how bone tired he was. He tugs on the blanket around Sophie slightly to make sure that it's not loose before standing and placing her in the crib again. The other comes up behind him, looking over his shoulder at the now passed out infant. "What does this do?" He murmurs.

"Hopefully help her stay asleep throughout the night so that you," Simon turns, placing his hands on his shoulders, "Can finally get some well deserved rest."

"Aye," Soap responds tiredly. Simon then leads both of the men to Johnny's room, the latter seeming dead on his feet at this point. Once in the bedroom, the shorter walks forwards slightly quicker. He trudged to the bed, collapsing on it and falling asleep immediately.

Simon huffs out a laugh, "Jesus, Johnny. Couldn't even make my job easier by getting under the covers?"

He grabs Soap, putting him in a more comfortable position— This time actually on the pillow— followed by him pulling the comforter out from underneath the man and placing it on him. The blond pushes the hair out of his face. He leans in, mumbling, "Goodnight, Johnny."

He then picks up the phone on the nightstand, turning off the alarms for the next morning and saving it in his mind on what time he should be awake to get the kids ready. Simon is desperately trying to give Johnny the break he deserves. So, the man can sleep in a bit. He makes his way back to his own room.

Johnny wakes up the next morning, not woken up at all again throughout the night by a screaming baby. Simon sits on the end of his bed, hand on his waist and a very well rested Sophie in his lap. He blinks at him, grumbling, "What time is it?"

"6:50," Simon informs. Soap's heart lurches out of his chest as he shoots into a sitting up position, literally scrambling out of bed. How the fuck did he manage to sleep in? Sophie smiles at the action. Glad

someone's finding this amusing.

"Fuck!" He curses, hastily putting on his socks, "We have to leave in ten minutes. The kids—"

"Are already ready to go. You really shouldn't curse in front of babies at this age, you don't want her first word to be fuck," Simon teases, turning around Sophie in saying in a silly voice, "Isn't that right?"

The baby grabs at his nose and Johnny would've usually melted at the sight. However, he was too busy standing there, dumbfounded. The kids were up? They were ready? Ghost then motions to his shorts, "Get dressed. It's too cold to be wearing that. I already heated up the car too but wouldn't want you freezing to death and making them late to school, now would we sergeant?"

Johnny stays there as he leaves. Quite literally frozen in his spot. Simon had woken up early and took care of getting them ready for school? An involuntary grin forms on his face. The heart that was once racing from adrenaline was now repeating the action for a different reason completely.

He shakes out of it.

—

As soon as Simon sees him coming down the stairs, he ushers the children out the door. "Got your lunches?" Johnny calls out.

"Yes!" They both respond.

As soon as they're in all in the car, Soap jumps in. The heat compared to the chill of the outside air is relieving as he places his two hands in front of the vents with a dramatic shiver. Alec giggles in the backseat. "Glad I told you to change?" Ghost teases.

He now has a black surgical mask over his face with a beanie and a hood up to cover his blond hair. Soap momentarily mourns getting to see the beauty of Simon in all of its glory but quickly pushes it down. He tugs on his seatbelt, saying, "If I didn't know any better, I'd say you're trying to get husband points."

The man in the passenger seat widens his eyes, a faint red underneath his mask. Johnny stills. He's about to open his mouth to apologize when Leah squeals out, "He's your husband, Uncle John?"

Alec sits up straighter, giving the two a weird look. Then, he interrogates, “Where ring?”

Soap whirls around to look at his niece in nephew, jaw dropping at the questions hurling his way. Kids take everything so literal. They don’t yet understand the tone of a sarcastic quip with no meaning. So, really, it’s his own fault.

He’s unsure of what to say at this moment. His eyes dart to Ghost. The skin around his eyelids are scrunched into crowsfeet, a clear sign that underneath the mask he is beaming in amusement. Great. So no help there. Guess he’ll have to suffer this one alone. He puts the car in reverse, reverting his gaze to the street behind him. Soap sighs, “No, we’re not husbands guys. It’s a figure of speech.”

“Dating then?” The oldest asks, cocking her head to the side. Her features were scrunched up in confusion at the conversation and Soap really should’ve gotten ready quicker so he could make himself coffee to prep him for this whole fiasco.

“N-No,” He stutters, “Not dating either.”

“Aww,” Both of the kids whine simultaneously, pouting. Soap raises an eyebrow at them. Why would they be disappointed by that? While he’s turning to put the car in drive, he sneaks a glance at his friend. The man shrugs.

Hopeless. All of them.

—

Soap is so tired right now, he could sleep for a year. The extra rest from last night really helped with how exhausted he was but it hadn’t caused the sensation to go away completely. Ghost had been surprisingly very helpful.

It’s not that he didn’t expect it to get slightly easier with him around. He was sure that he’d help sometimes. But this? It felt dangerously close to coparenting. It was something that he’d know he would miss once the man eventually finds his own flat to stay in after he got a little taste of everything he’s ever wanted.

The drop offs had gone smoothly. He added Simon to the pick up information. They both agreed that since they were living together, it would probably be convenient if that was done. They were going to add him to the emergency contact information but he hadn’t gotten a

phone yet. Johnny adds that to the mental list of things to do in his head. The daycare workers seemed hesitant at first, alarmed by his size and demeanor but quickly warmed up as soon as he stuck out his hand to introduce himself.

Now they were going to repeating the process at Leah's school. As soon as Simon and Johnny hopped out of the car, all of the moms lingering from dropping their own children off had turned to stare at them hungrily. He had been warned by his mother that this would happen. It was the first time since he had first met the principal that he had left his car to drop off Leah. Usually he'll just get in the drop off line.

He groaned, readjusting Sophie in his arms. Simon looks over. They had another silent conversation with their eyes, consisting of the taller asking if he's alright and Soap confirming that everything is fine. He signals towards the women. Ghost discreetly peaks before huffing out with more amusement.

He's been doing that a lot lately. Sort of, kind of laughing.

Johnny would never complain.

Leah, ever the oblivious, grabs onto her uncle's hands. She skips her way across the parking lot as she sings the alphabet on beat with each foot hitting the floor. Every day, his heart swells at these kids. He swears, he'll be the first man to have a heart attack from the overworking of the organ with positivity.

Once they get closer to the doors, Soap leans down. Leah smirks at him. "You enjoy your day, wee yin. Learn a lot," He says as he kisses her forehead.

"I will! Bye Uncle John! Bye Simon! Bye Sophie!"

The little girl moves to copy the movement he had just made, except placing it on her sister's head instead. The moms a little way off all coo at them. Once pulled away, Simon ruffles her hair. Then, she's off. Her book bag bounced as her tiny legs carried her into the building.

"Let's go!" He hisses to Simon. But they were too late. As soon as they turned, the moms were standing in front of them. Soap wishes that God would strike him dead— No, let's take that back. These children don't need any more trauma having to do with death.

"Hi," The first mom greets, "I'm Ella. This Ava and Nessa. We haven't

seen you around before. You two the Mactavish's new fathers?"

Soap and Ghost look at each other, matching expressions of panic at the question. They could easily lie. It would get the women off of their back. But then, they'd have to keep up with it and Leah would probably get confused if God forbid their kids decided to have a play date with her. They had just told her this morning that they were in fact not dating. Ones worse than the other he's supposes.

He'll always put the kids first.

So to his own dismay he corrects her by saying, "Uh, actually no. I'm her uncle. My name's John but everyone calls me Soap. And this is my friend..."

He trails himself off, not sure of what name his former lieutenant prefers. To the kids, he was Simon but to Johnny he was still Ghost, Simon, and Lt. The last thing he wants to do is make a decision for him.

Luckily, as always, Ghost understands his struggle. "Simon. I recently got discharged from the military so I'm staying with them until I figure out what I want to do as a civilian," He politely states.

"Oh!" All three women say at once, exchanging looks to each other. They weren't judgmental at all. In fact, quite the opposite of that actually. A tinge of possessiveness curls in Soap's gut at the clear interest on their faces but he has to remind himself that Simon isn't his to be jealous over. He brings his lips in to a tight smile.

Sophie tries to move her head to look at the situation but it thumps back onto his shoulder, still not strong enough to hold it up on her own. He uses that as a distraction. Soap moves her so that she's being cradled instead. The mom named Ava looks him up and down, scanning over him. What is with the mothers in this town?

His own had told him that since he's young, single, and practically a new face (even though he grew up here but whatever) the PTA women might be a little overbearing with the flirting. All his father did was laugh and clap him on his shoulder at the horrified look on his face. They all knew he was bi with a heavy male lean but they didn't know that he was literally in love with his former superior. So of course his dad would try to hype him up about it.

He wasn't very hype. Ava points at the fellow Scot, recognition coating her gaze. She then says, "Wait a second, I recognize you.

Yeah, we went to school together. You were the star goalie on our football team, weren't you?"

"Aye," Soap confirms, "That would be me. Stopped playing to join the service myself. Don't regret it, either."

"It's a shame. You were a good player."

"He was an amazing soldier, too. That's where Johnny and I actually met," Simon announces. Despite the friendly grin underneath the mask, there's a strange edge to his tone that Soap knows he's heard before during their time serving together. It had been towards a recruit at the time. Although, he can't figure out the pattern. It doesn't make sense.

He doesn't have too long to try and figure it out, though. Ghost continues, "I was his lieutenant and field partner. It's surprising how close you get to people in those types of situations. He annoyed the hell out of me when we first met but now look at where we are."

Ava's brown eyes dart between the two men, a calculating introspection in them. Soap stands straight in attempt not squirm underneath of it, afraid she'll see right through his feelings for the person standing next to him and blurt it out. It doesn't come. Instead, Nessa speaks up, "Aye. Heard he's good at that. Should've seen him in school. Real charmer, this one. Got out himself out of a lot of trouble just with that alone. Heard he spray painted the headmaster's car once. Is that true, Johnny?"

Both men tense at the name. It's an unspoken thing between the two of them that he really likes to only be called that by Simon. Well, he spoke of it to Alejandro once. "Soap," He chuckles awkwardly, "And yes. It's true. In my defense, the old bastard had it coming."

"How did you not get arrested?" Ella asks.

"Oh no, I did. They just couldn't hold me because there was no proof I did it, only rumors. Buried the cans after."

"Yeah," Ghost sighs, "His mischievous behavior is also something that followed him into the military, much to our captains dismay."

The group laughs. The conversation was going to veer into dangerous territory soon of asking for numbers. He could feel it coming. The clock felt as if it was ticking loudly against his skull as every moment passed.

Don't get him wrong, they were all beautiful women. They seemed friendly and anyone who anyone was lucky to have. But first things first, Ava is wearing a wedding ring and she's the one that's currently glaring at Simon for some reason. Secondly, he is interested in said man being glared at. Even if it's one sided, he is the type that once he's actually interested in someone, he's intensely loyal to them. Everyone else just becomes regular people. Not worth pursuing.

"Don't have time to be like that anymore. You know, raising three young kids n'all. Speaking of that," He segues, turning to Simon, "We have to go speak to the office about something. It's was great catching up with you Ava and Nessa. Also great to meet you, Ella. We'll see you around."

He spins on his heel, not bothering to look back as he makes his leave. Simon is just going to have to follow his lead. God, he hopes that the blond follow his lead. Soap isn't sure if he could take listening to him flirt with someone over the phone in their shared house like that. But, the sound of footsteps behind him eases all possible nerves about that.

"Wait!" Ava yells after them, "Maybe you wanna exchange numbers, Soap? We could have the kids have a play date sometime!"

They're far away enough to pretend like they couldn't hear them. So, Johnny does. Luckily, so does Simon. Ghost leans in, whispering, "Is play date just a codeword for 'date?'"

"Apparently in the parent world it is," He hisses back. Sophie babbles in his arms as the two walk as quickly as they can away from the women. Soap likes to think she's agreeing with them on their conclusion.

Once they're back at the house, Johnny feels as if he got no sleep at all. They come into the door and he throws the keys into the bowl immediately, groaning at the day they've had so far along with it not being over any time soon.

On the way home, they had stopped to get Ghost a phone. He had tried to pick out a standard flip one but Johnny had managed to convince him to buy one where he could job search and allow the kids to play on sometimes instead if ever need be. Not going to lie, he didn't like being a guardian that handed a kid a screen to make them quiet down but he's come to find that it comes in handy during grocery shopping or other boring errands children tend to act up on.

It's not that he judged others that do. It doesn't hurt anyone, really. He's just personally seen the fit that Alec will throw when it's time to give the electronic back and he's really not in the mood to deal with it like ever. It's his worse tantrums for sure. It causes a whole scene so Soap really only tries to use it during emergency moments. He utilizes his feet to take off his sneakers since he's holding the baby before walking into the living room, settling on the floor. She was going to need a nap soon. But some tummy time to wear her out a bit seems like a good idea.

He shucks off his jacket, letting it rest in a pool behind him. It's not too long until a shadow is hover over him. "Johnny," the familiar deep voice says. Soap turns to look at Simon, humming in question.

"Go back to sleep. You're still tired."

It's not a request. Not at all. It's the same tone of voice that he used to use on the field. One that says there's no arguing the command allowed and he's only really ever followed rules without even a second of doubt when it came to Ghost.

That being said, there's still so much to do on the checklist. Find out what's for dinner tonight, clean up a bit, call his mom for advice on what to do about how Leah has been behaving and try to dig into if Alec is always so reserved, the baby needs a nap, needs to be fed soon too, then he still has to call the doctor about Sophie's frequent crying.

It hasn't been bad today. In fact, the infant has been quite bubbly today. She's been smiling and babbling a lot. But still, it'll ease his mind to get confirmation that it is in fact just colic rather than something else.

So, he questions the command.

"The checklist isn't done," He deadpans. Ghost halts the movement of taking off the mask, raising an eyebrow at him. He sighs, adding on, "I have a daily checklist that I keep in my head. If it's not done, I don't rest until it is. That's my rule. That way, I don't let my ADHD procrastinate the things I have to do for the kids. It creates less stress later on."

"You definitely didn't do that while under my command," the other jokes, sitting down next to him with a groan. Old ass man. He's not too much older than him, but still. At least Soap doesn't like Price yet.

"Get the fuck!"

“Johnny. The baby. I swear to God, if her first word is fuck, I’m telling your mother.”

“Okay, honey,” He mocks in a light manner, “Let’s not jump the gun yet. We still have time before then. Besides, her first word is going to be John.”

“That’s incredibly hard for a baby to say.”

Soap snorts at that. He turns to stare at the man incredulously. It will be John. If it’s not, he’ll be the one throwing a temper tantrum, he decides dramatically. What else would it be? He’s going to make damn sure it’s his name.

Johnny fondly thinks of the time where his sister and brother-in-law used to get competitive over which one will get the glory of having the first word be one of them. Chris had won with Leah, Anna with Alec. Sophie was supposed to be the “tie breaker.”But now...

Part of him wants to continue that for them but he doesn’t want to confuse the little one or accidentally have her calling him dad. Chris is still her father. He would never step on his position like that, even if he’s not around anymore. It would feel wrong to do that.

“So, I have a question,” Simon says, taking him from his thoughts. He shuffles closer before pivoting his body to be facing them.

“I may have an answer.”

“The kids,” He starts, “Their last name is Mactavish. Why didn’t they take their fathers name?”

Soap smiles, stating, “Because he took ours. You see, Chris had three brothers— All with kids. We however, have two girls and a boy that wasn’t going to have any. No one to carry on the last name. Now, it wasn’t that big of a deal if no one did but my parents were very disappointed when they found out I wasn’t going to have kids because of my career.

“My da’ told me I was the last one to carry their namesake. It was a joke but at the time but Chris made the decision that he wanted to take ours instead. Especially because the relationship with his family wasn’t really the best after he refused to take over his father’s business. They disowned him. The kids don’t really know that side of their family because of it. They don’t get invited to birthdays or holidays. Very nasty people. Our side doesn’t have any interest in

trying to interact with the likes of them anyways. Too much drama.”

Ghost nods along, gaze locked in on a spot in the floor. There’s a deep consideration in his eyes. Johnny wants to ask what he’s thinking but before he can, the look is gone. “Makes sense,” He notes.

“Aye. So he became a Mactavish rather than her becoming a Brier. Besides, their children were going to be closer to us anyways. My family is very... involved in each other’s lives,” He pauses, “It is a shame though. I wish they could know that side of the family but Chris has always made it very clear that if something were to happen to him, they allowed no contact with them. Even wrote it in his own will.”

“The wills, that’s another thing. In your sister’s will it stated that you got custody. What about his?”

“Same thing,” Soap responds, “In the event of both of their passing, I get them.”

Simon looks over at Sophie, before pulling out his phone to check how long she’s been on the mat. The ten minutes were obviously up because he leans forwards, lifting her to gently place her on he back instead. She stares up at the little fish hanging from the arches above her in wondering, kicking her feet and clenching her fist.

Both men stare at her adoration. Johnny never knew he could love something so much. All three of the kids became his whole world as soon as he had read that they will go to him.

“They seemed like a good couple,” Simon suddenly observes, turning his gaze to Johnny.

“They were. They had that kind of love that you only see in some romcom. Always on the same page, a deep trust in each other that never wavered even when things got rough. Totally devoted to each other, also. The attention from other people annoyed them,” Soap muses, “When they had met, Anna had just decided that she wanted to be a doctor. Never got to do that sadly... But, he was working at a construction site near her college and one day she accidentally bumped into him, spilling coffee on her. Been inseparable ever since.”

Sophie continues to kick her feet, now attempting to lift her head and reach for the fish at the same time. The development in her movement skills slightly makes him feel better about her general health. Sometimes, he thinks he’s a bit paranoid.

He continues the conversation in hopes of not spiraling, “They were the healthiest couple I’ve ever seen— Don’t you tell my parents that, by the way.— Big on communication. That’s why I don’t understand what’s going on with Leah.”

So much for distracting himself. Instead of doing that, he swapped to a whole other topic to worry about. Simon furrows his brows, questioning, “What do you mean?”

“Well,” Soap sighs, “Her parents always taught her to talk about what’s bothering her. Which, usually she’s great at. She talks to me all the time about their passing. But... Something’s going on with her and she’s refusing to open up about it.”

“Well, they’ve been through a lot with their parents passing. I’m sure that it’s a lot for her to handle emotionally.”

“Aye. I know that. Something tells me that’s not it, though. I have this gut feeling that it has nothing to do with her parents and it’s bothering the hell out of me.”

Simon gives him a slightly annoyed look with no real heat behind it at him cursing again. It’s more of a “Really Johnny? We’ve talked about this,” more than anything, honestly. He’s never seen that expression on him before and he clocks it into his memory as soon as he sees it.

At that moment, it clicks for him that the relationship between Anna and Chris also fit the two of them, minus the whole romcom being in love thing. But they knew each other like the back of their hand. They’ve started communicating in a way that Johnny didn’t even know was possible, telling each other exactly what they’re thinking. They were so in tune. Any step that Soap took, Simon took. Any decision Simon made, he followed along.

The older man runs a hand through his blond locks, breathing out, “You can’t force her to talk to you about it. That’ll only push her away further. Trust me, I know—“

“Aye, me too. You’ll never guess who I learned that lesson from.”

Simon smiles, shoving him lightly. Johnny lets out a soft laugh before straightening himself up again. The former lieutenant picks up where he left off, “As I was bloody saying— Oi, you can say that instead of fuck. Just a note. Take it as you please and by that I meant take the advice— You can’t force it. She’ll come to you when she’s ready.”

Soap rolls his eyes. He rests his head on the seat of the couch. There, on the floor, he decides to be sort of bold. It's not known what possessed him to do that but he does. "Like you did?" He observes.

Simon looks at the ground shyly. When their eyes meet again, there's a certain peace in both of them. He moves his head in confirmation. "Yeah. Like I did."

Soap smiles to himself, unable to hold the intense gaze for long. He opts to look at Sophie instead afterwards, all confidence fading away to a giddy nervousness. However, his brain stops when he notices what she's doing. His arm shoots out, grabbing the man next to him's. He gasps out, "Simon."

Ghost turns, body tensing up in anticipation as he finds the scene that Soap was currently looking at. Sophie was wiggling her body left to right, in an attempt to turn herself over onto her stomach.

She huffs after a bit, giving up entirely. "Just after I taught you how to swaddle her too," The blond comments, "Can't do that anymore without watching her closely. She may roll over if we do. Was this on your checklist for the day?"

"No," Soap says back. They both are keeping a more watchful eye on her now, not even bothering to look at each other anymore. It was simultaneously out of fear of missing it and not paying attention to her if she somehow managed to rollover without being able to lift her head off the floor.

After a while, underneath her eyes were starting to have bags and she let out a long yawn. It reminded him just how tired he too was. Simon looks back over at him. He feels it more than he sees it. The man slaps his hands on his thighs.

"Speaking of which, we need to get a board of some sort if you're keeping a checklist in your head," He mumbles, standing, "And you need to get some rest. It's not a request Johnny. Don't know how you roped me into that conversation but go get some more sleep."

Soap watches him stretch, locking onto the little sliver of pale skin being revealed by the shirt riding up. His mouth dries. The room suddenly grew in temperature at the sight and formed his hands into fists to stop himself from doing something stupid like reaching out to grab that waist of his. It doesn't get any better when he bends down to pick up Sophie.

Steaming Jesus, this man was going to be the death of John Mactavish. He's taken out of his stupor when the man finally starts to walk out of the room, speaking into the air behind him, "Go to sleep, Johnny!"

"How can I when you just added another thing to the checklist?" Johnny shouts back so that he could hear him from the kitchen. The groan in response is enough confirmation.

Soap, full of pride at this, gets up to drag himself up the stairs and do exactly what he was told to do. After all, Simon's here to help him now. He can finally have confidence that he's not in it alone anymore and start to take care of himself again.

Chapter End Notes

I stumbled upon the flirty pta moms causing jealousy back in my buddie days and fell in love with it. Due to that they will be back.

Jealousy will continue on both sides. It's going to be fun dw they won't date any of them. These mfs are too into each other but both oblivious of the reciprocation on the other side. Hope you enjoyed the chapter! As always don't be afraid to leave comments. They make me unbelievably happy.

Gaz

Chapter Summary

Gaz comes to visit with some news. He then tries to knock some sense into both Soap and Ghost while they're supposed to be the ones helping him.

Chapter Notes

I'm thinking about doing a time skip next chapter?? Like maybe only a month or so towards around the time where Sophie starts to experience more milestones. How do we feel about that? Let me know

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Simon has been there for a week and a half now and has fallen victim to the perpetual tiredness. Johnny and him sit at the dining table, sipping their coffees. Which, should tell one how tired the poor man is because he doesn't even like coffee. Back in Las Almas he had made that very clear when he had mentioned wanting a cup of tea rather than literally the one drink that a cafe was created for. Fuckin' Brits.

The doctor informed them that it is in fact colic. She gave them some more tips on how to soothe her which they have been trying but it's only a 50/50 chance that it'll work. Soap is just happy that Sophie isn't waking up her siblings during the night. He's not sure if Simon and him would win the battle against three young exhausted children while both being fatigued themselves.

Sophie was asleep in her rocker now, giving the two a slight break to just breathe and exist in quietness together.

That idea goes out the window with a frantic knocking on the door. Johnny and Simon make eye contact. He watches in real time the alarm on the blonds features warp into the same concentrated look that Soap has seen countless times on the field. Its assessing. As if he's trying to figure out if there could possibly be danger on the other side of the door. The younger of the two stands as the frantic banging continues. He opens it to see Gaz standing on the other side, eyes the size of golfballs and sweat pooling down his face as if he'd just ran a marathon. "Gaz?" Soap asks, shocked.

Simon then ushers over, placing himself behind Johnny and looking at

their friend from over his shoulder. Both of their eyebrows were connected in the middle due to how much their expressions were screwed together from the sudden visit. Gaz's jaw slacks, pointing at Ghost, "Ghost?"

"Affirmative. What are you doing here? You solid? You look as if you just ran here all the way from base..." Simon observes out loud. The sergeant was slightly huffing and puffing, hands on his knees. The concern in Johnny deepened every moment that passed by. He steps aside, allowing for him to come in.

Gaz nods his thanks before making his way into the house after their former lieutenant also moves out of the way. Once inside, the door is closed. Their friend stands in the middle of the house, looking around at everything in wonder. "Would you like some coffee? Water? Maybe a damn inhaler?" Ghost teases the man, earning him a slight glare.

"Still got jokes, mate. Good man."

Sophie starts making noises from the other room, signaling that she's awake in her rocker. Not wanting to leave her there by herself because of the whole object permanence thing not existing yet and how she panics when alone when by herself. Soap claps a hand on Gaz's shoulder before leaving the room. "Sophie!" He greets, voice high pitched as he reaches out for her.

The little girl widens her eyes, kicking her feet sporadically and letting out tiny grunts of excitement. Her hands raise and crash back down multiple times. Johnny picks her up, placing multiple kisses on her face as he makes his way back to their guest. He looks back up to see Gaz has completely stiffed up his muscles as if he was a wooden board rather than a human. The white in his eyeballs were totally visible as his eyelids stayed blown open.

Simon looks over at him then back at Johnny. Who just shrugs in response. "Alright, sergeant," He states, "What's going on? Why do you look like you're going to pass out?"

Gaz shakes out of it, haphazardly sitting on the couch and burying his head in his hands. Soap comes up to stand next to his housemate, Sophie kicking her feet in joy again as she realizes he's there. Simon leans down into her space, beaming at the baby as he does so. He brings a long finger up to attempt to boop her little nose, which she clasps onto right before he can. "Good job!" Ghost praises quietly, "Good grip, Sophie. You're getting so big."

She was. Her growth spurts was the main cause for them having to go out to the baby store today and get some more clothes and possibly a pack n'play. It's better for her to nap in rather than the rocker and it will help to be able to keep her in there as she gets older while they clean the house or cook dinner. Soap smiles at Simon. Then, looks up to see Gaz watching the two men, shoulders relaxing slowly as he does so.

"My girlfriend is five months pregnant," He blurts. The blond jerks his gaze over to their friend. They all stand in frozen silence at the news, not exactly sure what to do or say. First off, Gaz has a girlfriend? Secondly, that girlfriend that obviously neither men had ever heard about once, was pregnant? Five months? He does the math of how long he's been gone from base. It's only been a month and a like a week and a half. Why did he not know about the girlfriend?

"O-Okay, wait," Soap stammers, moving his free hand as he spoke, "I didn't even know you had a girlfriend, which was totally rude of you not to tell me about, about by the way... and now you're telling me that she's five months pregnant and you're just finding out now?"

Gaz throws his own hands up in defense, whisper yelling, "She didn't show! The doctor said something about her uterus being tilted or that some women just don't show like in the movies. I don't know— She had scheduled a gyno appointment after she realized that she hadn't had her period for a while and they told her to take a test to be sure before they make an appointment. She did and boom! She's bloody pregnant."

"Why are you whispering?" Simon asks, narrowing his eyes.

"I don't know!" Gaz says, throwing his body around frantically as he does so. Soap and Ghost make eye contact, both blinking blankly at each other. Wordlessly, Johnny hands the baby over to the blond before moving to sit down next to their very distressed friend and placing a hand on his shoulder.

"Alright," He soothes, "Let's calm down a bit, aye?" Gaz nods, inhaling and nodding. He closes his eyes, letting out a steady breath while Soap rubs his thumb in comforting circles on his shoulder blade.

He knows that Gaz would be an awesome father if that's what the couple chooses to do. But it's not like they planned it. No one suspected it. It's a big surprise for everyone involved and it's a huge life changer— Soap would know. It's not like getting a new job or

moving to a new house, it was a whole other human being that you were responsible for. How they turn out depends on you.

He's going to freak himself out if he continues down this path. "So," Johnny clears his throat a bit, "What are you guys going to do?"

Gaz sighs, "Well, we both are taking a moment to ourselves to think about what we want individually, not wanting to feel any sort of pressure from each other. So, I ran here for the day. You're my best friend and the only one I know on this planet that's been through something similar. I mean, Soap, I love my life. I love my job, my girlfriend... Which sorry I didn't tell you about, by the way. Kept her a secret just in case there was some sort of data leak or another betrayal at some point and I didn't want a target on her head."

Soap can understand that. They worked a dangerous job and all it took was one guy you pissed off finding out about someone that you loved... Then it all would go away. It's a big reason why he himself had decided to leave. Putting the children in a situation that could lead to someone finding out about them and trying to hurt them as some sick act of revenge is something he still fears, even with the task force in his rear view.

The man continues, "My current life is great... but do I really want to try and cling onto it anymore? If we decide to raise this child as our own rather than putting her up for adoption, there's just no staying in the 141. If I really think about it, though, the 141 would be the only reason why I'd choose not to and that's basically already over. I mean, you two are gone and Price is retiring."

"What?" Both Johnny and Simon demand at once. Sophie jumps at the suddenness while Gaz winces, awkwardly looking between the housemates as he does so. The both hold their breath at the baby but luckily, the yelling didn't scare her enough to cause her to start crying, only stare at Simon in concentration. Gaz seemed sort of guilty — Soap was getting good at being able to pick up on that feature— as if he had just said or done something wrong.

Based on that, he's guessing that Price wanted to be the one that told them. But Price? Retiring? Why would he do that? He still has so much more good to put into the world. Was he starting to get tired? Was he alright? Why wouldn't he call? They just texted him yesterday to give him Simon's new number.

Was he going to show up on his doorstep next?

What is up with the 141 showing up on *his* doorstep without any semblance of warning? Even his nose as all hell biological family at least would call to tell him they're stopping by. But maybe it's because the 141 are a little bit closer than his family. They knew almost everything there's was to know about each other. They almost died together. They've saved each others lives over and over again. Suppose that makes things a bit different in hindsight.

"Why is Price retiring?" Simon asks, "Don't tell me it's because of us."

Gaz shrugs, saying, "He says he's tired. Something about the one thing that he wants back is long gone and he doesn't want to be left behind? Honestly, it's all sort of hazy. He had told me a bit ago that they approved his retirement request and we had both been quite drunk at the time. Said he's not coming back after the Christmas holiday leave. We're getting off track—

"What I'm trying to say is, everything has changed for all of us in the blink of an eye. Life comes at you quick, I guess. I just don't think there's anything worth holding onto back at base anymore. I could have the life I've talked to you about wanting in four months. It's right there. I'm just scared."

Soap breathes out through his nostrils, pursing his lips for a moment. He's trying to find the wording to help out his friend as he was in the same boat just a month or so before and he had been just as scared. "It's terrifying, Gaz. Especially when you don't have any warning. But you're absolutely right about one thing, everything you wanted after the military is available to you in four months time and you're not even sure if there's anything worth holding onto in the field anymore. What does your gut say?" He asks, nonjudgmental.

No matter what Gaz chooses to do, he'll support him. Simon stood off to the side, eyebrow raised at them as he let Sophie play with his fingers. The man next to him flops backwards on the couch after a moment, slightly defeated when he answers truthfully, "I want to move on. Callie, that's her name, still needs to decide but if the rest of my family is going to be gone by the end of this year than there really is nothing to stay for. And I want this. I really do."

Johnny smiles at him and Gaz gives a weak one back. Uncertainty was clear as day on his face but it's honestly something that's expected. It's hard to get in the SAS. Plus, once you're in that life it's hard to see you doing anything else especially a normal civilian life with kids.

"Always have to follow whatever I'm doing, Gaz. Don't ye?" Soap jokes, "Couldn't let me have the glory of willingly leaving the 141 because suddenly children needed me. You just had to do the same thing?"

Gaz laughs loudly at that, throwing his head back as he does. He seems more relaxed now. Still tense but he knows that feeling of fear won't fully go away anytime soon. The stress of constantly worrying about your kids is one that'll keep someone on the very edge of their seat. Does it ever go away?

He concludes that it doesn't. His mother still frets over him to this day and he's a grown ass man. He wonders if one day, on his death bed, if his only thoughts will be about whether or not Leah, Alec, and Sophie would be okay without him. He thinks that it will. Gaz sighs, wiping a tear from his eye that was caused by him laughing so hard. "Always told you that I wanted our kids to grow up together one day, Soap."

"Aye, that you did. Universe took that one a little too seriously."

"It always does. Who's technically the one that got fucked over in this situation?"

Soap raises an eyebrow at him, then slams his hand down as he tells him, "My sister literally died, Gaz. I think I got-"

"Johnny..." Simon cuts in, warning in his gruff voice. Gaz looks at him with wide eyes as the taller man motions down to the baby with his head. Johnny has to cover his mouth to make sure that he doesn't let out a laugh that would surely make Ghost give him that same bored but annoyed stare from the other night. Every time he says "fuck" now, his former superior does it.

Just when he's about to defend himself by letting him know Gaz said it first, Sophie squeezes Simon's hand, her little face turning a bright red. It has him scrambling in his brain for who changed her last. The one thing that both Johnny and Simon had to come up with a system for when it came to doing the work to take care of the baby; poops.

Infants have the worst poops in the world. Ask any parent and they can tell you that sometimes, it's horrifying. The two men switch off. Whoever did it last gets to make the other do it the next time and so forth, a system.

Simon smiles innocently at their friend, which throws the sergeant off due to the fact that he's never been on the receiving end of a very

visible grin from their ex-lieutenant. But Soap knows him. He knows that's not the normal way he does it and he certainly can see the mischievous glint in those brown orbs. "Oi, Gaz. C'mere."

Gaz, ever the oblivious, stands. He pulls down his shirt to readjust it, making his way over to their taller friend. Johnny leans back. The Scot crosses his arms over his chest, a smirk on his face. Simon hands Gaz the baby, mumbling, "Make sure you support her head. She still can't hold it up on her own."

He helps adjust the positioning of Sophie and once satisfied, turns to pull the coffee table out of the way so that there's a spot left on the floor in front of the couches. Gaz stares in horror at Ghost, interrogating, "What are you doing?"

The blond doesn't respond, opting to turn to the diaper bag by the entrance and grab some objects out of it. He comes back, feigning innocence again before laying the mat down on the ground and then tossing the change of clothes (sometimes it's really that bad), the diaper, and the wipes down next to it. Afterwards, Simon straightens himself up and sits next to Johnny on the couch.

Their bodies were pressed against each other, causing the shorter one to start to blush furiously. It's only worsened when Ghost wraps an arm around him, motioning for Gaz to go ahead with his hand. His heart was beating out of his chest. He turned his head to glance at him. Simon noticed and actually grinned the normal soft one he does this time without reciprocating the gaze. He abruptly twists his attention back to the scene in front of him, not wanting to give away any of his nonplatonic thoughts or feelings about the man next to him.

Gaz was frozen as he asks, "You serious, mate?"

"Deadly. If you're going to be a dad, then we'll start you here," Ghost responds. Johnny tries to ignore the flutter of his heart at the thought that maybe the man meant *we* as in both of them. As a team. Gaz groans. He then slowly sits down, placing Sophie onto the mat.

"So what do I do?"

"So you have to-" He starts but Simon cuts him off by pulling him closer. The older man shrugs. The mischievousness hasn't left him yet and Soap wonders if this is how Ghost would've taught him if he hadn't been physically exhausted. It wouldn't be surprising if he did. His way of training had always been making the person get the hang of it themselves rather than showing them over and over again

hopelessly. Eventually he'd step in. But usually he just stands back, observing quietly as he looked for any flaws in the routine.

Gaz looks at his best friend, betrayal in his brown eyes. Soap makes a play of zipping his lips and throwing away the key, causing his friend to slink his body slightly in exasperation. Sophie starts to make frustrated noises. "She doesn't like when you take too long," Simon tells him, "You know, sitting in your waste isn't too fun."

Gaz flips him off before getting to work. Luckily, Sophie hadn't dropped hell into her diaper like she sometimes seems to do. So their friend did fairly well. However, now the two men were sitting and watching in amusement at Kyle struggled with exactly the same thing Soap had when he had tried to change one by himself. Which way the diaper went.

The sergeant mumbles questions underneath of his breath, flipping the object around before deciding that the way he had it could possibly be right. He tries to put it on Sophie. She kicks it out of his hand, opening and closing her mouth at Gaz as if trying to to speak to him. Johnny can feel Simon shake with barely concealed laughter besides him. Gaz looks at her, putting out his hands in a confused motion. "What did you do that for?" He asks.

The little girl puffs at him with a cheery look on her face. Gaz's eyes soften. Then, she tries to roll over again like she had the other night and the youngest man shoots his hand out in panic to hold her in place gently by her stomach. "Don't worry about that too much. She can't roll totally yet. She's just turning two months in a couple of weeks and that's when they can start to learn how to flip themselves over so she's going to try her damndest to do it. You're doing great, Gaz," Soap comforts him.

He nods, hesitantly letting her go before picking up the diaper again. Simon has now started to rub his hand up and down the Scot's arm. Johnny's skin felt as if it was on fire. His breath hitches slightly in his chest as his body starts to slightly tingle from the sensation of his fingers against his clothed skin, mind attempting to wander in how they'd feel against bare skin. He tries to focus on Gaz's struggling instead.

It does work. Him and Simon are eventually laughing at the younger man. It reminds him of the days when the two would get Garrick to be the one that does something stupid in attempts to prank him or get him in trouble with Price. Slowly but surely, Soap's world seems like

it's filling up with all of the people it was missing after he had left the 141. He missed this. He missed his best friend looking at him in the exact way he was now, frustration and desperation mixed in at the lack of help.

Soap's laughter fades. He stands up, accidentally pushing himself up with a hand on Simon's thigh. He feels his cheeks flush at that but shakes it off. They'd let Gaz suffer enough. Besides, they still had to run to the store before they picked the other kids up from daycare and school. He leans down next to Gaz, talking to him slowly and showing him how to put the diaper on her.

Simon's eyes never once left him.

—

They had convinced Gaz to come with them to the baby store, hoping for him to see what it was like and learn some things from the experience. Simon grabs a cart and brings it over the car as Soap gets her carrier out. They work in perfect sync. He places Sophie in the correct spot on the cart, mumbling to Simon, "You solid to push? Arm not bothering you today?"

The blond slightly shakes his head in confirmation, pushing the cart forwards. Soap pats the taller's back as he walks ahead before turning to lock the car. Gaz is lazily stepping behind them with narrowed, observing eyes scanning over the two. As if looking for confirmation about something in the way they interacted with each other. Soap ignores it.

Once all three men and baby make it into the store, Ghost speaks from behind his black surgical mask, "What do we need, Johnny?"

"A play pin, which Gaz and I will get, new clothes, more pacifiers, and diapers," He responds back, "I think that's it."

"What about formula?"

"Shit, actually yeah. Good catch. Wouldn't want her starving to death," Soap chuckles, wincing. Simon snorts at that before walking with Sophie towards the first aisle that holds the diapers while the other two split off towards the furniture area.

They walk in silence. Well, Gaz walks in silence. Soap is talking about all of the kids and their recent accomplishments. Leah got an A on her spelling test. Alec can now partly write his name. Just every small

thing that they've managed to do. There's pride rumbling off of him in waves along with a tug at the corner of his lips. His friend listens intently. Somehow the conversation turns into how much the children adore Ghost and how great he is with them.

The two are now standing in the pack n'play aisle. He was still talking about Simon as he lull over all of the options. Most of her things in her room were butterfly themed but both her rocker and tummy time mat that were downstairs were fish, which is where the playpen is going to go. However, the couches were black. There were one of each. A fish one, a black one, and a butterfly one. Maybe the fish one because it does ma-

"I'm happy you two got your shit together, Soap," Gaz states, genuinely. Soap's eyebrows knit together and his mouth gapes as he tries to ask what he means. Kyle's own drops into a frown.

After a moment of Johnny opening and closing his mouth, his friend groans while pinching the bridge of his nose between his fingers. "Mactavish..." The tone is dejected. He can't begin to understand what caused the disappointment thrown his way. Sure, Gaz knew about Soap's feelings towards Ghost. Always has. He had been the first one that he told, considering that they tell each other everything. Well, almost everything. Soap didn't know about Gaz's girlfriend. He makes the subconscious idea that once in his own relationship someday, he'll hide it from Garrick despite understanding his reasoning.

"You're meaning to tell me," Gaz starts, straightens up and placing his own palms together, "That you two aren't at least—"

"No! Haud yer wheesht! There are children here," He scolds, slapping a hand on his friend's mouth. It earns them strange looks from passersbys but excuse him for ensuring that they don't have to have awkward conversations with their kids later about the thing they overheard in the store earlier from the crazy men in the playpen aisle. The brunet knocks his hand off of with a loud slap. Johnny yelps, even though it didn't hurt. He gets an eye roll for that.

"Mate, you two are *raising three bloody kids together*," He hisses in a rushed tone. Soap blinks at him. That couldn't be farther from the truth, even if he wishes it wasn't. Ghost was just helping. He knew that the Scot was losing it so he stepped in to help while he was trying to get back out into the world. They just happened to be two adults that were currently in charge of a group of kids— It didn't mean anything.

“Oh my God,” Gaz says, slapping his hands down, “I can see it. You’re doing the thing you do again where you try to rationalize why I’m wrong in your head. Soap, every time he talks about something it’s never anything else but a ‘we.’ And you do it too! You gotta be taking the piss, man. There’s just no way you guys aren’t together yet. You were cuddling on the couch while I was there changing your baby’s diaper!”

“Friends cuddle,” He deflects.

Gaz then argues, “We don’t. You and Price don’t. Ghost is different. You are different. You’re both growing into this mature relationship and you guys aren’t even realizing it- Oh, Lord I’m going to have a headache. You two are more healthy than my parents and you aren’t even dating...”

Soap’s eyes widen. He puts a hand out, requesting, “Please do not trauma dump in Baby’s R’Us because something about that feels incredibly uncomfortable and problematic.”

Customers around them were now actively avoiding the aisle, obviously feeling awkward by overhearing that odd sentence. His anxiety was starting to grab at his stomach. What if Ghost ends up accidentally hearing what they’re saying? He doesn’t want him uncomfortable. Not after they just fixed everything. Gaz now looks confused. He looks around the store, pointing at nothing really, “This is a Baby’s R’Us?”

“No,” Soap replies.

He then makes his way over to the fish playpen, inspecting the price. It’s not too bad. Sure, they could probably find it on Amazon for a lot cheaper but they don’t know how the quality would be or if they’ll get scammed. It’s just not worth the risk. He slaps a hand on it, turning to his annoying friend, “If anything ever happens, I’ll be the first to let you know. As of right now, nothing has. So help me with carrying this thing so him and I aren’t late to picking up the kids later. We still need to build this damn thing.”

“You and him,” Gaz mocks, “The kids.”

Johnny glares at him as he raises his hands in surrender with a small, “Just saying.” Both men grab one of the boxes stocked beneath and were surprised by how light it actually was. They meet back up with Simon in one of the food aisles. He takes the carrier out of the cart so they can put the box into it instead.

Ghost hands Johnny the carrier. The blue eyed man responds with a light touch on his uninjured arm in thanks. They get the things they need and while walking to the car, Gaz thinks allowed, "I missed you guys. Maybe I'll try to see if I can convince Callie to move out here. It wouldn't be the worst thing in the world and I'm sure that if I did, it will help us all out in the long run. Right?"

He flashes his teeth at them. Soap can't help but return it, excitement at the thought of having their friend close by causing it to be slightly wider than Gaz's. "Aye," Soap confirms.

He really hopes that he will.

All three of them stood with their hands on their hips, looking at the pile of materials on the ground. Gaz had the instructions in his hand as he scratched the back of his head, looking at the crumble on the floor and then back at the paper. "It says you just have to pull it until it clicks into place," He supplies.

"We've tried that," Simon argues, patiently, "There has to be something that we're missing."

"All it says is pull it until you hear two clicking sounds from each leg, then place full size bassinet and changing area if needed," Gaz explains, shoving the paper in his direction. Ghost takes it, reading over the words again while holding out his hand in confusion.

Soap glances at his watch, seeing they still have an hour and a half before they have to leave to go pick up the kids. He sighs. Then, makes his way back to the crumble on the floor. He hears Simon hand Gaz the instructions again before coming up behind him and placing his hand on the small of his back.

Johnny swallows down the feeling of his heart stopping, trying to instead concentrate on the task at hand. The two men nod to each other. Then, get back to work.

After what felt like hundreds of more tries, they're staring at the set up pack n'play. Sweat was dripping down both of their foreheads and they were heaving heavily from their efforts while Gaz gave them a thumbs up. Soap makes his way over to him, snatching the instructions and shaking them violently in the air. "Easy assemble, my ass!" He grumbles breathlessly before collapsing on the couch.

Simon follows suit. They both sit for a second until the blond checks the time. Then he whines, "Sophie needs to be fed."

"I can do it," Gaz whispers. The two look over, seeing that despite how nervous the idea made him, he also seemed like he really wanted to do it. Ghost and Soap exchange yet another glance. Then, Simon stands with a grunt.

"Good man," He states, "Johnny has to go pick up Leah and Alec so I'll show you how to feed her."

The two of them leave the room then. Soap looks over at Sophie, who was fast asleep in her rocker from the eventful day they all had. They still really hadn't planned what they were doing for dinner and really didn't get a chance to clean. Part of him is jealous of the baby that she gets to sleep she whenever she wants to, kinda like a cat.

He mentally laughs at the thought. If anyone's like a cat out of all of them, it's Simon. Although, Gaz was right. He has been different but only with him, really. When they're alone in the house with the kids, the man doesn't seem to care about how much he talks but now that their friend is here he seems to be a little more reserved again. His sentences are shorter. They're not as softly said either.

His smiles aren't as wide and he isn't openly talking about how his arm is feeling today, instead shaking or nodding his head. He knows that it has nothing to do with how the blond feels about Gaz, it just seems as if the full experience of Simon is only meant for the four other members in the house. Especially Johnny.

He gets up, moving to the front door and grabbing the car keys from the bowl. From where he stands he can see Ghost and Gaz talking to each other in the kitchen as Simon is gesturing to the bottle warmer. He looks at the way the sun shines in on the blond, making his hair glow radiantly. The way all the muscles under his skin move or how his full lips move while he speaks. He's beautiful.

Johnny wishes that Gaz had been right. That there was at least something going on in between them instead of the weird situation that they were actually in. He tries to imagine a future with someone else in that kitchen but he physically can't. Right there. Simon and the kids. That's all he wants. The little taste of it will leave him heartbroken when eventually, Simon goes to lead his own life and maybe find someone to settle down with.

But for now, they have each other. Even if it's not in the way Soap

wants, he's grateful for the opportunity. "Hey, Si?" Johnny calls out, quiet enough not to wake the baby as he pulls on his jacket. Simon looks up, listening.

"We didn't get anything out for dinner tonight. Do you just want me to pick something up on the way home? Maybe pizza or something?"

The man responds back, "Yeah. Whatever the kids want is fine. Be safe, Johnny."

There's a little bit of a reluctance on his face, not used to not going with him to pick up the children. Sometimes, he'll try to offer Simon to stay here but the man will just shake his head and come with. Probably doesn't want to be left alone. Most likely feeling awkward by himself in Soap's sister's home.

Ghost watches Johnny leave, eyes still on the door even after he's gone. An anxiety settles in his stomach over it and makes him completely forget why he's staying here in the first place. Gaz elbows him. He shakes out of his stupor, "Right. Sorry."

He takes the bottle out, placing it on the counter to cool for a little before turning off the machine. His brain still feels muddled by the fear of something happening to Johnny and the kids while he's not there but it's unfounded. They should be entirely safe. So why is he so scared? "Ghost?" Gaz asks, softly, "You alright, mate?"

He rubs a hand over his face, mumbling, "I don't know."

He then breathes out aggressively, grabbing the bottle and testing the temperature on his wrist. Not too hot, not too cool. Perfect. He gestures for his friend to follow. They make their way back to the living room where Sophie is starting to blink herself awake. Gaz takes the bottle from him and sits on the couch facing the television, watching him take the baby out of her rocker.

After teaching Gaz how to feed her, he observes him by sitting on the couch by the window. His eyes dart between the driveway and the baby frantically, not knowing exactly where to look. "Ghost," Kyle says.

He stops his movements upon seeing the sympathy in the brown eyes staring directly at him. Simon doesn't know how to react under it, adjusting under the guise of trying to get more comfortable on the

couch. Gaz then soothes, “They’ll be just fine. I didn’t expect you to have separation anxiety, man.”

“It’s not separation anxiety,” He retorts. But was it? There’s absolutely no way, right? No. Something tells him it goes way deeper than that. There’s of blood behind his eyes, a toy airplane, and Christmas lights. He squeezes away the memory by shutting his eyes tightly. He turns his head back out the window, breath quickening with every second Johnny’s car doesn’t roll back into the driveway.

“Does it have to do with your family?” The question is hesitant, almost seeming to come out in the wind rather than a grown man. Simon looks back over at Gaz. The man tenses up, explaining, “You never talk about them so I figured that something happened to them. You don’t have to tell me what happened to them. I shouldn’t of asked —“

“Yes, I think so,” Ghost interrupts, eyes scanning over the street outside again. It realistically would take a while for the three of them to get home but he still waits for that moment to come, trying to fight off any idea that something horrible had happened while he wasn’t there. Again.

He trusts Gaz. Sure, he’d trusted the other men that had murdered his whole family at one point but he’s worked really hard not to turn on the taskforce due to his trust issues. So, him giving Garrick that little confirmation of what’s going on his head was him signaling that trust. “Do you love him?”

Ghost turns again, looking at Gaz with a blank expression as he ponders on how to respond. Yes. He loves Johnny more than he’s loved anything in a while. The kids too. It’s why he’s sat at this fucking window and why this little trigger of him not being able to watch after them will probably send him into a spiral of nightmares later tonight. “Yes,” Simon responds, “I do.”

“There’s no ‘I think’ in that one,” Gaz jokes, setting the bottle on the table before placing Sophie in a position where he can burp her. He starts patting the infants back.

“I’ve loved Johnny for a while now. Probably since Las Almas,” He answers easily, “If it wasn’t for him, I would’ve allowed myself to do exactly as I said I would, die on the field. But I kept going for him. Even if he was mad at me for running away on some solo mission instead of being there for him, he was still worth it.”

“So, why haven’t you told him?” Gaz presses. Simon watches the window again.

“Because I don’t want to lose him. If he doesn’t feel the same, I lose everything. That’s not a risk I’m willing to take.”

Gaz comes over, sitting directly in front of him on the mirroring cushion. There’s a little humor in his eyes but mostly a deep determination. For what? Simon couldn’t tell you. “So, then... What’s the plan? Stay here forever with him and never tell him how you feel? Do you see how that might not work?”

“No,” Ghost chuckles, “I’m not an idiot, Gaz. I really am only staying to get back on my feet. There’s certain things that prevent me from getting a normal job or flat. The callsign has some truth to it. I’d have to do everything under the table and that’s fairly difficult, especially since I’m staying here in Scotland no matter what.”

Gaz looks puzzled. Sophie lets out loud burp, causing both men to smile. The younger of the two then lays her down on his lap, holding her in place with one hand as she throws her hands up and down. “What happens after you find your own place, then?”

Ghost shrugs, “I stay by him. I’m content with having Johnny in my life any way I can. I’m not a picky man.”

Gaz scans him. He squints slightly before a laugh brushes past his lips as he shakes his head. Simon forms his mouth in a confused grimace. The other man sighs, looking at his old lieutenant full on without even an ounce of fear as he says, “That’s not how that’s going to work. You’re not leaving here. It’s going to take you a while to figure out all of that and by that time, something will have happened between you two. Or, you’ll both be fuckin’ idiots and cling onto each other as long as possible until eventually that dam breaks. Either way, this doesn’t end the way you think.”

Simon doesn’t know how to respond to that. There’s so much confidence in the man’s voice. He didn’t even process that someone had said fuck in front of Sophie *again*. Didn’t Price say the exact same thing, basically? Why does it seem like everyone seems to know something that he doesn’t? He’s going to find out. He interrogates, “How do you know that?”

“Because I knew Ghost and Soap forever. But today, I met Simon and Johnny. Parents and partners. You guys are both helpless— Why do I have to explain everything? For the love of God...”

Chapter End Notes

Thought it would be funny if Gaz ended up in a similar boat to Soap because i had a realization that it would be so cute for Sophie to have a cousin she grew up with. Bc imagine family parties with the 141 and those two playing together oh my god. So behold; Gaz father era too.

Grandpa Price is about to have his hands full. REAL.

Still Here

Chapter Summary

Three month time skip. Johnny and Simon are helping Gaz move into his new place in Scotland when something triggers Soap into remembering his sister.

He kind of spirals. Simon informs him he thinks it's time Johnny gets some extra help to cope with all of this. Fluff ensues.

Also; Simon develops a new habit.

Chapter Notes

this one's a little sad but it's okay. they got each others backs.

Chapter title is inspired by Still Here by Digital Daggers.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

3 months later

It was a Saturday, which means all children were home. Gaz had decided to leave the military and Price had let him go with understanding. Him and Callie had agreed to move to Scotland closer to when the baby would be born as they both had some friends here who could help them get started on their journey as parents. So that's what today was. Moving day.

Soap and Callie sat off to the side in the spring breeze on their new lawn, watching both of the other men anxiously trying to tell the movers how to do their job. Alec and Leah were playing tag. "Not too close to the street!" Soap scolds once they got a little too close for comfort. Sophie, who was sitting on his lap screams loudly while flopping her arms as if to highlight his point.

Callie laughs, "She's gotten so big since the last time we saw her."

She was a beautiful woman. Her dark, curly hair was shoulder length, she had bright green eyes, and a smile that lights up any room in seconds. She was also kind. Gentle. The day Soap had met her, he told Gaz she was way out of his league and all he had done was grab the Scot's chin, forcing him to look at Simon with a grumble of, "And he's not out of yours?" Of course that then caused the same argument

where they both were debating on whether or not something was going on between them.

“I know,” Soap responds to Callie, “She keeps growing like a plant.”

He snatches the infant off of his lap, causing Sophie to squeal in delight as he flips her so she’s in the air like Superman. She giggles, attempting to grab at her uncle’s face. “Isn’t that right, wee yin?”

She babbles back. Callie smiles widely at the two but then lets out a gasp as Soap pretends like he’s going to drop her. Sophie roars with laughter at the action so he keeps doing it as he chuckles at her reactions.

“Johnny!” Simon yells out, “Be careful with her, would you?”

“Awa’ n bile yer heid, Simon! She’s fine. Have some more faith in me, won’t ye?” Soap calls back. Still, not wanting to give the man any more anxiety, he brings Sophie back down to his lap to sit there. She leans forwards, trying to rip at the grass. He makes it his mission to keep her from doing that, as he learned from earlier that apparently she would like to eat the greenery. Simon makes his way over to them.

Soap watches him walk over. The way the sun hits him is perfectly accentuating his beauty. He had on one of Gaz’s hats, it being spun backwards. Little growing tufts of blond peaked out from underneath the headwear. The brown eyes almost look honey in the beams, black t-shirt clung to his body quiet nicely due to the sweat dripping off of him from the times where he and Gaz were too stubborn to let the movers do it themselves, and his pale skin shone, complimenting his muscles. Johnny hadn’t been able to resist the urge to whistle. Callie snorts next to him.

Simon raises an eyebrow at the action. “Looking good, Lt,” Johnny compliments, “Swear, I can’t take you anywhere.”

He receives an incredulous expression back from the other man that now stood over him. Even so, there seemed to be a slight red hue on his cheeks that wasn’t there before. He brings his hand out, shoving Johnny’s face lightly with a, “Nice try. Not going to work.”

Sophie squealed in delight once she noticed Simon, reaching up at him with grabby hands. She babbles at him. The man smiles softly at her, now crouching down to Johnny and her’s level with an overly happy expression on his face that was obviously played up only to get her

excited. It worked, of course. She let out a scream again, touching the blond's face and attempting to pull him closer to her as she squished his scarred cheeks.

Now it was Soap's turn to flush as Simon leaned forwards quickly to press a kiss on her forehead, so when he pulled away he was dangerously close to Johnny's face. It's been getting harder to contain himself as time goes on. There's moments like this where he wants to nothing but grab Ghost's stupid face and kiss him senseless. Friendship be damned. Sophie bounces up and down, mimicking Simon's face once he's back to looking at her.

He takes a stuffed butterfly out of his back pocket and holds it out to her. He watches her clumsily try to grab at it. "I do have faith in you. You know that..." He mumbles, followed by him looking up at him, "Just not in your clumsiness."

It takes a second for the words to compute due to how close Simon is. If he really took the time to, he could count every faded freckle on his face, every scar, and every eyelash. He would study the beauty up close. The slight gold and greenish flecks he had in his eyes, the way his mouth moved— Abruptly he comes back. When he does, his lips form into the involuntary pout that they always seem to do.

Simon gives him a soft smile, along with a, "Kidding. Just be careful with her, yeah?"

"Aye," He sighs dramatically, "You come over here to be mean to me but give my niece all the love in the world. I'm hurt, Si. Hurt."

A loud crash can be heard from inside the house along with Gaz trying to stay calm. Callie goes to stand but Simon signals her to just stay where she is, not wanting her to worry too much since she's literally about to burst at any moment. She obliged. Soap was only here to watch the kids and keep her company since he was the better conversationalist between him and Simon, otherwise he'd be helping. "Do you guys need help? Because I can—"

"No, Johnny. You just sit here and look pretty," He teases, flashing his white teeth at him. Soap feels like he needs a moment to reboot. Then, of course, Simon leans forwards and plants a kiss on *his* forehead. As he stands and walks away, Johnny swears he can hear the sound of dialup in his brain.

"Now you can't complain!"

His cheeks felt incredibly hot, having nothing to do with the weather outside and he knew he were very red. As the man is passing Alec and Leah, the little boy cheers, "Simon!"

Simon turns to see the two little monsters running at him full speed and the grin on his face gets wider as he leans down, picking them both up in one arm and spinning all of them around in a circle. Soap feels himself falling more in love. See, you always hear about how attractive a man is when they're good with kids and you happen to have them.

But no one fucking talks about when you have children and then you see how much the kids adore that man. It makes you melt. A little alarm in your head starts screaming that this means that you can be a family because if the kids like him, that means that you're free to also. Simon places them down, watching them both start spinning dramatically with "woah"s and "I'm dizzy"s. Leah falls onto the ground first with Alec watching her and then following her lead.

Simon readjusts his hat with a laugh. He then turns to Soap, who was still blushing furiously from both the kiss and what just happened. He blinds him with another smile. Then, jogs up to the door with a deep, "Oi!" towards the movers. Those two. They're a going to be blood drawn by the end of the day, he can feel it.

Callie prods his shoulder. He slowly turns to look at her as she moves her own shoulders blades in a jokingly seductive way while cooing, "He likes you."

"Oh, stop—" Soap tries to brush it off, flapping his hand in a shooing motion.

"He wants to kiss you and marry you and help raise your children with you," She jests. Johnny could feel his cheeks growing hotter and hotter to the point where it felt like he himself was starting to sweat. He was going to have a heatstroke at this rate. Sophie looks between the two adults before slapping at the grass again.

"Oh, come on, John!" Callie scolds, shoving him lightly, "You're not going to find any better in todays dating pool. He is literally the perfect man."

Soap rubs at his arm as Sophie tries to put more grass in her mouth. He pulls it away lightly, readjusting her so she can't grab at it anymore. She starts to writhe a bit, letting out noises of discontent but as soon as he picks the stuffed butterfly off the ground, her eyes zero

in on that. She stops. She grabs at the butterfly, putting it her mouth.

“Need I remind you that you are dating my best friend?” He says back, raising his eyebrows at Callie. She scoffs at him.

“I’m not interested in your man, Soap. I’m happily in love with Kyle. No one even compares to him. I’m just saying,” She makes a motion towards him, “For my friend, he’s perfect. He’s practically your boyfriend already and you’re not going to find anything that’s even close to how smoothly things run with him. Don’t waste it by being dumb and stuck in your own head.”

They continue to talk about nothing and everything, as if they had been friends forever. Leah eventually comes over, asking if she can put her hair up for her. Something about it slaps John directly in the face. Not because she had chosen to ask Callie over him, he figured that’s because in her brain Callie knows how to do it while Soap doesn’t. Which, is true. The slap wasn’t from Leah but from himself. It’s one of things that had slipped his mind when he first started raising them and now four months in, he can see that it should’ve been a big priority too.

He watches Leah wait patiently while Callie ties her hair back. He frowns, unable to keep up with the movements. Once Leah is back to playing with her little brother, he turns and asks her, “How did you learn how to do hair?”

Callie blinks at him, answering, “My mum...”

There’s a pang of grief at Johnny’s heart as soon as the words come out of her mouth. Great. Another thing that Leah will be missing out on due to the world being cruel and taking her mother away too soon. His sister.

Callie must notice his dismay since she places a gentle hand on his arm, bringing him back from the darkness he was being dragged in to. “Look,” She starts, “There’s some things that you won’t be able to teach her how to do but that’s okay. Don’t beat yourself up for it. She has other people in her life that can if she shows interest in those things and you can always learn yourself. How about I send you some hair tutorials later? Maybe you can start tying up that mess on your head into a bun or something for practice.”

Soap groans, running his fingers through the way too overgrown mohawk. He really hasn’t had time to cut it recently. Alec’s birthday is in two weeks so they’re running around trying to get a birthday party

together for him.

Her offer was very nice. He would love to try and help Leah learn how to do her hair. He smiles, nodding to her. Callie beams.

Soap is still heartbroken.

The whole ride home, Johnny didn't say a word. He could feel Simon glancing at him with worried eyes but he didn't feel strong enough to look back. His eyes focused on the road as the three kids cheered and sung and babbled in the backseat.

Simon got out of the car first, watching Soap as he unbuckled Sophie while the brunet unbuckled Alex. There was a broken smile on his face, one that he was putting on his face for the kids more than anything since there's no need to be like: "Hey, remember your dead mom? Yeah, well I'm missing her dearly right now and have been subconsciously doing so the past couple of months but won't allow myself to feel it because I know you need me instead. Even though I feel as if I'm failing you too."

So, he fakes it whenever he feels like this. Usually it's at night when everyone winds down so he can go to the room he's staying in and cry- because it really even his room? It was his sisters. Now? He still doesn't know.

The five of them go into the house, it feeling just as hard to walk in there today as it did the first time he had. Soap is the last inside. Simon leans down to the kids, "Why don't you two go get ready for bed, alright?"

Alec nods happily, running up the stairs. The other one, however, stays back. "But I'm not tired," Leah whines. Sophie reaches to tug on her older sister's brown hair in an attempt to grab anything on her person but Simon stops her.

Soap sighs. Of course, Simon was going to notice something was off with him. He always has. "You're not going to bed yet. I just need a moment to talk to to Uncle Johnny, okay? Afterwards we'll watch a movie tonight. Deal?" He asks, holding out his pinky.

She nods, linking her own with his while Sophie widened her eyes and grabbed at their hands. Both Simon and Leah laugh at that. Then, she's following Alec up the stairs. Johnny tries to push past Simon, not

wanting to put the burden of what was going on his head on him. A strong hand stops him. “Johnny. Don’t.”

Don’t hide yourself away. Don’t shut down. Don’t do the thing you do where you act okay for everyone else’s benefit.

That little word could mean any of the three. But he doesn’t want a lesson right now, he just wants his older sister to hold him and tell him what to do. He tries to think about the last time he had felt her comforting arms around him as he broke in front of her. It’s too fuzzy. Too old. Too long gone, never able to get back.

He can’t do this right now. They are all still awake. They need him to be okay.

Soap takes a breath, pulling himself to together before turning to look at both Simon and Sophie. The man still had his hand curled into the front of Johnny’s shirt, eyes frozen on him and mouth pulled into a concerned frown. Sophie just seemed confused. “I’m fine,” He says steadily, wrapping his hands around his friend’s wrist and prying the hand off, “We had a great day, aye? Let’s end it with a movie.”

The Scot turns to walk on his heel into the living room. There’s the sound of footsteps behind him not too long after. Simon growls out, “Johnny...”

He closes his eyes. Two hands grab onto his shoulders, whipping him around to face the blond who looks even more worried now. Sophie watches from the playpen. How quickly had Simon put her in there before coming to him?

She’s starting to get to the age where she can understand emotions based on actions and tone of voice meaning that she probably knew something was up between her two caretakers. That’s the last thing that Soap wanted. “Simon,” He starts, “Really, I’m fine. You don’t have to—“

“Stop,” He commands. This causes Soap to snap his mouth shut obediently, a part of him slightly embarrassed by the fact that it only took one word from the man in front of him but a bigger part of him was just so tired. “What’s going on? What happened? You were fine earlier when I left you on the lawn and now you look like you’re hardly even here. Where are you at?”

The pleading in his tone breaks Soap’s heart as the former lieutenant shakes him lightly, eyes searching his face. He opens his mouth to tell

him yet again that everything is okay when the two older kids come bounding down the stairs. Instead, he smirks and jokes, "Duty calls."

It was three in the morning when Johnny sat on the on the kitchen floor with a bottle of scotch in one hand and a family picture he had found on the wall. In it stood Chris, Anna, Leah, and Alec. There was some fake barn in the background of it and everyone had their hands placed on her very pregnant stomach with wide smiles at the camera.

He took a swig, not caring to grab a glass as he rubbed his hand along his older sister's face. His throat feels tight. Her blue eyes bore into his soul and he feels a deep pit of shame from it. He slams the back of his head on the fridge, taking another swig to hopefully kill off the forming tears. "I know," Soap whispers, "You're disappointed in me."

He glances back down at the image. This was the last one of his sister from when she was alive. She had a strict rule that after she gave birth, no pictures were to be taken of her face since she always believed she looked puffy after. Chris always told her to be gentle on herself. She would just roll her eyes.

God, Leah looks exactly like her.

He looks around at the house. He realizes then that nothing around here is really his. That everything was exactly how his older sister left it, aside from the new playpen in the living room along with his and Simon's coats at the door.

It drives him crazy.

Nothing against his sister, but they didn't have similar tastes at all. She always liked a more modern style while Soap himself liked more homey vibes like light woods and brown couches. Maybe a splash of orange, yellow, or green here and there. Everything being black and white with no personality really amplified the feeling of him staying in a hotel rather than his new home. Nothing but a guest. He frowns.

But there's no way he could change it. This was the scenery that she envisioned in this household. This is the environment that she had wanted her kids to live in. He couldn't.

He stares at the front door accusingly, as if any second now she'd walk into it and tell him that it was all just some huge prank. They're both alive. Even though he knows it not possible and he had seen her

resting body at the funeral. He just wants her back. He wasn't ready to give her up and he constantly feels as if he's fucking up with these kids, no matter how often his mother praises him over the phone. It doesn't matter. She hasn't seen their whole dynamic in person.

She doesn't see the times like today when Leah knew that he had no idea how to do her hair or him falling asleep while vacuuming the couch the other day. Or the way he fell down the fucking stairs on his ass with Sophie in his arms once and gave Simon a heart attack. His back had ached for days after that one.

His sister would've killed him.

Sometimes, he wishes that God, if he's real, would've taken him instead. Johnny doesn't understand why he hadn't. Out of all of the Mactavish siblings, he was the one who had the most dangerous job but his poor older sister on the way home one night was the one that went first?

She would've definitely killed him for that thought process.

"I'm trying, Anna. I'm really trying," He breaks into tears, the bottle pressed against his forehead as he squeezes his eyes shut, trying to remember the sympathetic look on her gentle features. The way he hands used to feel, carding through his hair as she sung him to sleep when he was a little boy that just had a nightmare. The picture clatters to the floor.

Soap lets himself feel the loss. For the first time since the funeral, he allows himself a moment actually grieve the loss of her. His second mother, his best friend all of his life... Before four month ago, the man couldn't picture a moment without Anna being a call away but now he was living a whole new life without her.

A hand on his knee startles him out of the memories. He blinks frantically. Simon is crouching in front of him, much like he had earlier, with a blank expression on his face. One that reminded him more of Ghost. Soap snorts to himself, wiping the tears off his cheeks and then taking another drink straight from the bottle. "What're you doing up, Lt?" He asks.

The blond sighs, reaching out to take the bottle from him gently and reaching behind himself to place it on the breakfast bar. "Checking on my favorite sergeant," Simon responds.

He then takes the picture frame off of the ground, staring at it for a

moment. Brown eyes look at John, then the picture, then John again before the item is placed next to the booze. Johnny chuckles, “Knew I was your favorite.”

“Don’t tell Gaz.”

The Scot pretends to zip his lips before theatrically throwing away the key and holding up his hands in innocence. Simon exhales sadly, moving to settle down next to him. Every part of their body was touching as they sat with each other, neither saying a word to on another in the rare moment of absolute silence. Their pinky’s were slightly placed on top of each other, just enough to where if Soap really had the balls, he’d be able to hook them together with ease.

Soap lazily lulls his head over to look at his housemate, best friend, and the man he’d been in love with for God knows how long now. The gulps that he had taken along with him haven’t had drank alcohol in a bit caused him to be sluggish, brain spinning slightly. “I miss her,” He whispers honestly.

Simon slowly blinks, turning his lazy gaze to Johnny as he nods. It was a sign to continue. Soap scootches himself closer to the warmth radiating off of the man next to him as he mumbles, “I’m fucking this whole thing up. I don’t even know how to do Leah’s hair correctly. That should’ve been one of the first things I taught myself how to do, no? Or at least taken her to get a haircut. She can’t do them things on her own yet. Then I fell down the stairs with Sophie—”

“Alec left his toy car on the stair and you didn’t see it. Or did you forget that part so that you can blame yourself for absolutely no reason?” Simon cuts him off, “As for the Leah thing, you had other matters going on. You still brushed her hair every morning for her. It’s not like you left it knotting up and unkempt or anything. You’ve always been way too hard on yourself, Johnny. Even when you were a soldier under my watch, you often got in your own way by pushing yourself too hard or getting too deep in your own head. That was on Alec, not you. And when you corrected him, he learned not to do it again. You never learned how to do hair, either.”

Soap thinks on that. He had forgotten about the whole toy car factor and the fact that it had been six in the morning at the time when everyone had just woken up. “And,” Simon continues, “You haven’t allowed yourself to your sister go. She’s not coming back, Johnny. They put you as their guardian for a reason and you need to stop thinking about what she would’ve done and follow your instincts like

she trusted you to do. Tell me, when Price used to give you explosives did you try to place them where you thought he would've?"

"No," Soap laughs at the comparison, "But children are not explosives, Si."

Simon just stares at him for a moment. His eyes are wide with disbelief. He then ask, "Are you sure about that? Did you not *see* Alec when we wouldn't let him put the fork in the toaster the other day? I've never heard him scream that loud. I thought for a second the neighbors were going to call the cops."

That manages to get a laugh out of Soap. It's little. But it's certainly there. He allows the warmth to linger, even as Simon goes back to sitting quietly besides him. The dark house still feels just as stale as it had all those months ago, despite the fact that they've been living it for as long as they have. If he really concentrates, he can see his sister bustling around the very kitchen that they were in. Stress on her delicate features.

Her long, wavy brown hair flows behind her as she searches for some cooking tool that she misplaced. The blue eyes scan all of the counters. Then, theres a chuckling from her mouth once she realized that she was holding it.

He swears that she's just right out of reach. That his fingers tips could brush the white laces on her Nikes if he dared to try to touch her. But Johnny knows that the parts of her that he sees in this house are just nothing but memories. Well... and possibly being a bit drunk.

Even, so. He's not ready to let her go. How could he? That was the first person that Soap ever looked up to. A kind soul. A gentle smile and an understanding heart. Someone who never tolerated bullies or any type of bullshit but always moved with such grace in comparison to her younger brother's recklessness. So, he says to the man next to him, who was being nothing but patient as his brown eyes wandered over him, "Simon, I don't know *how* to let her go."

An arm wraps around his shoulder, pulling until his head rests on a muscular chest. One hand laid on his back while the other ran through his overgrown hair. Soap closes his eyes, listening to Simon's heartbeat and letting the ghost of his sister disintegrate from his vision. "We'll just find someone who can help you learn how to, then."

Johnny sighs, opening his eyes and wrapping his own limbs around his friend's middle. Simon holds him in that moment as if he was

something worth clutching onto, something fragile. The anxiety sizzles away. All that's left over is the feeling of his fuzzy head and a peace as he buries his nose into the crook of the tatted arm. "Can't you just teach me?" He mumbles into the skin.

"No. I can't. I've never learned how to let go myself."

"Then come with me. I don't want to do this alone. I can't."

"Johnny," Simon pulls away, grabbing the Scot's face and forcing him to look the him in the eyes, "I'm here. You're not alone. You have me, Gaz, your parents, Callie... You have a huge support system behind you. But we can't go to therapy with you. That's supposed to be your time where you can be totally open and honest."

"I can be totally open and honest with you," Johnny responds back and he watches Simon's gaze soften. He rubs the thumb in soothing circles on his cheek, grounding Soap even more with that simple action. Most people knew Ghost as the man that brought death and darkness wherever he stepped, being nothing but a merciless killer that would gladly take one's life before they'd even comprehended what happened.

They feared him. People ran. Back in Las Almas, Soap had heard people talking about how much the masked figure scared them. But to Johnny? He's just a man.

He's the exact opposite of what everyone said he was. He wasn't some omen of death that didn't care for anyone. No, not at all. The rumors seemed so far away now, somewhere untouchable. The idea of believing such things had always been a foreign concept to the soldier that had tried to lie on enlistment forms about his age. A proper troublemaker that marched to beat of his own drum.

The cocky young adult had strut up to the infamous Ghost as if the two had knew each other for years, almost like they were two buddies about to get caught up over some beers. No fear. No hesitation.

It still had been work to get where they were now. At some point, the theory of The Ghost being nothing but a man slowly had gained more merit in Soap's eyes. Then he learned his name was Simon. Such a gentle name for an omen. Not deserving of the fate that had been tied to him. And so, Soap had made it his personal mission to get that darkness that followed the man to leave. Because Ghost was never that void of nothingness. Even if that was what everyone, including the man himself, saw him as.

Soap never fell for it. He wanted Simon to see that he was the light. That the gentle name held no threat to Ghost or whatever reputation that was built around the callsign. That they were one in the same. That even if he saw himself as the omen of death, he could still be allowed to be human all the same.

Somewhere along the line, Soap had become Johnny and Johnny had fallen clumsily from friendship to an irresponsible love. If Ghost had believed that there was no such thing as friendship in the field manual then what was he going to say about something as weakening as love? *No loose ends. Or, men like us don't get to love.*

There was a certain beauty in it, being in love with death.

At the time it had felt as if he sat at the bottom of a grave, next to a blond man that had been shut out long ago. One named Simon. One with a tiny smile and sad brown eyes. One covered in blood and bruises and scars but still beautiful nonetheless.

Until one day he realized that Simon wasn't trapped. Neither was he. Instead, Ghost had let him in to see the most guarded part of himself, someone that he kept hidden from the world. There was no grave. Only a field at which they sat at the bottom of and slowly but surely, Johnny had understood that he had succeeded in letting Ghost know that he wasn't some monster in a story. That all he was a man.

So, death became Simon and Johnny still loved him all the same. For all of the flaws that were there, all of the good. Everything. Doomed to possibly never have the feelings reciprocated but blessed in the ability of just knowing him.

But then he had to leave. His sister had died and that darkness had chosen taken over Soap instead. The only difference between the two was that Ghost had embraced it fully while Johnny tried to act like it wasn't there to begin with. One became it, the other let it eat him alive.

Yet, in this kitchen, Simon had recognized it. He was the light that Johnny tried so hard to show him that he was from the moment they had met.

The brown pools scanned over his face. His admission to being able to be totally open and honest with Simon lingered in the air as they sat in silence. He could tell that his former lieutenant was searching him for any indicator of a lie, not trusting that Soap wasn't just trying to act like the darkness wasn't clinging onto him. He sighed out, "No,

you can't. And that's fine because I know that it's not a me thing but a Johnny thing. You're not hiding from me, you're hiding from yourself and I can't help you stop doing that. Just like I can't help you let her go."

The unspoken "because I did the same thing," clings to the air. Truth be told, Johnny doesn't know what he did to be allowed to see Simon as someone other than the hard shell of Ghost. Otherwise, he's sure he'd try to apply it to himself. But the admission looks like it kills the blond. It genuinely wounded him to say that he can't fix whatever is going on in the Scot's head considering he doesn't like feeling helpless.

Truth is, it kills Soap too. Not that Simon can't fix it but that he can't shake all of this off like he's usually able to. He can't compartmentalize it. So how could his friend even begin to try and figure it out? He places his hands over the ones resting on his face, whispering, "I don't expect you to."

"Johnny," Simon sighs, hands slipping down his face until they rest on his neck, "Just..." There's a struggle going on in his head, he can see it. The clock reads 4 am now and he's thankful that it's a Sunday morning so that they can both sleep in after this taxing day.

"Just promise me that you'll stop pushing everyone away. Even if I can't fix this for you, I don't want to be left in the dark," He mumbles back. The desperation on his features is so strong, so begging. It pulls at Johnny's heart.

"Alright," He nods, "I promise, Si."

Simon nods back, letting go of him before standing. He tightens the cap on the alcohol while Soap remains in his spot on the floor. The blond then puts it up so high on top of the cupboards to the point where not even Johnny can reach it without trying to clamber on some sort of surface. Soap throws his hands up in annoyance.

The blond snickers back at him, slightly. Then, he's hovering over the other man, looking down at him with a soft but silent stare. Soap just blinks back. "What?" He asks.

"Just lookin' at you sitting there being pretty just like earlier," Simon teases. Johnny's cheeks flush probably for the hundred time that day. God, the things this man does to him without even trying.

It gets worse when he's instructed, "Now be a good boy and move

over so I can adjust tomorrows checklist.”

Johnny blames the slow reaction time on the alcohol rather than all of the blood in his head rushing to other parts of him at that sentence. He shakes his head aggressively after a moment. Then, follows instructions. Simon hums his appreciation.

Soap watches as he erases the current checklist off of the magnetized board on their fridge. He is then taking a marker out of the holder and writing in the first line, “JOHNNY - THERAPIST.”

The brunet groans in response, “You’re really serious about that?”

“I’m putting it on our checklist, aren’t I?” Simon responds back, continuing to write all of the other things that need to be done tomorrow like vacuuming and homework. Johnny scoffs.

“Why don’t you go to therapy too? Maybe we can both get better together.”

“I can’t,” His friend deadpans, “I’m legally dead.”

Soap sobers up immediately at that, sitting up straight with his mouth hanging wide open in shock. A hand comes out to help him up. Johnny takes it, causing him to be hauled up onto his feet and he has to catch up with the momentum to make sure he doesn’t crash into Simon’s chest.

Maybe that whole metaphor of Johnny falling in love with death was a little too accurate.

The taller man then turns, making his way to the stairs. He makes it two steps up before Soap chases after him, hissing, “So we’re just not going to talk about that?”

“No,” He responds, leaning on the railing. He was towering over Johnny more than he normally does, causing the shorter man to crane his neck back just so they can maintain eye contact.

Johnny then states, sarcasm dripping from his tone, “Good talk.” Simon smiles genuinely at him and annoyingly, all frustration fades away immediately at the sight. Instead, now he’s standing there in awe. Something about the man’s smile always had Soap’s emotions going haywire, not sticking to any original plans of being angry or sad once that bad boy is in play.

“We’ll talk about it eventually,” Simon responds, chin resting on his hand, “I only brought it up because otherwise I’d look like a hypocrite.”

“Still do.”

There’s no real heat in Soap’s tone as the words come from his mouth, causing the other to roll his eyes playfully. Then, he leans forwards and places a kiss on the messy brown mop on top of Johnny’s head. All thoughts short-circuit. “By the way, we are already getting better together. Sometimes extra help is just needed. Nothing wrong with that,” The man says.

Simon doesn’t wait for him to reset before mumbling a goodnight and bounding up the stairs. Johnny stands where he was left, unable to comprehend what the hell had just happened. Part of him thinks he’s dreaming. The other part is just incoherently screaming with some loud ass music playing that could possibly be a rock song? No idea. The brain he relied on broke.

He shakes his head yet again, trying to get his head to silence before going to bed.

Chapter End Notes

Simon is going to be that dad one day that just drops the most traumatizing and horrifying dad lore and then act like nothing happened.

Leah, Alec, and Sophie will be like: □□□

Therapy and Birthday Parties (Part 1)

Chapter Summary

Soap goes to therapy.

Alec has a birthday party.

Chapter Notes

I don't know how I feel about this chapter so sorry if it's bad. I feel not too proud of this one 🙄

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"What is your name?"

"John Mactavish. My friends call me Soap."

"Tell me bout yourself, Soap."

"I'm twenty six years old. I'm a veteran and I'm raising three children following my sister's untimely death."

Johnny watches the man write on his notepad, his green eyes glancing over at him every once in a while. The look on his face reveals nothing. A practiced skill of not showing his clients what he was thinking about them or their situation. The name tag on his chest read "Dr. Troy Gerber."

He was a middle aged man, probably only a little older than Price if he has to guess. There were wrinkles around his lips and eyes, signaling a happy life full of laughter and smiles. Dr. Gerber sets down the pad, leaning forwards slightly as he asks, "What brings you here today?"

"My uh," He stammers, unsure of how to word it, "My Simon— Sorry. My friend, Simon, told me that this was probably something I should be doing. I was struggling with the loss of my sister and being able to understand that she's gone. Neither of us really knew what to do to make that better, so here I am."

Soap slaps his hands down on his lap during the last part of that sentence with an awkward grin plastered on his face. He's blushing slightly from the slip up of calling Ghost "his Simon." He prays that the therapist won't mention it but judging by the twinge in his thick brow, it's not looking too good in that regard. "Simon is your..." He prods.

"Friend. Ex boss. Mostly just friend," Soap explains.

"You call your old boss by his first name and he's actively working with you to solve your own personal life problems?"

"What is this?" Soap chides, pulling at the collar of his own shirt, "An interrogation?"

Dr. Gerber smiles calmly at that. There was a patience in his eyes that seems to combat Johnny's restless behavior. The therapist sighs, "I'm just trying to get to know you and your personal relationships, Soap. You don't have to tell me anything you don't want to. Not until you're ready."

The younger of the two deflates slightly, kind of feeling bad at the immediate distrust that he had in the poor man who's just trying to do his job. Maybe they'll work on that at some point. He looks around the room.

The walls were a pristine white, much like a doctor's office. Many awards and certifications hung on them along with what could only be family photos as the man in front of him was in them with a woman and two kids. He hates that his mind starts scanning the pictures for any anomalies, as if trying to detect the lie within the paper. As if this man wasn't someone he claimed to be.

Military training in full swing after years of being shot at by people that he once trusted really does a number on you. Especially when in an unfamiliar area. It's not easy to turn off.

Soap runs his hands over his face. Then, says to him, "I'm sorry. Simon was my lieutenant when I was in the military, can't dive much deeper in that aspect of our relationship, I'm afraid. Classified... Anyways, now he's staying with me temporarily."

"Why?"

"Classified."

Dr. Gerber lets out a chuckle at that, scribbling more things onto the

notepad. Soap distantly remembers his own sketchbook that he keeps shoved on the inside of his jacket pocket at all times. Another habit learned from serving. It was the same exact one from his time, too. It never left his person unless he was home or it was too hot to wear a jacket. Then it was hidden somewhere in the house.

"He's the one that asked you to start therapy?" The therapist questions.

"Yes sir."

"You said you were struggling to accept that your sister was gone," He starts, "Tell me a bit about that."

The clock ticks on the wall. The constant sound sort of eases Johnny's mind along with the anxiety that's telling him to find a weapon to fight with or flee. It's an instinct that appears whenever he even feels the slightest bit uncomfortable in an unpredictable situation, made worse by being in a tiny room with a person he hardly knows.

He closes his eyes, breathing in deeply. He reminds himself that Simon and the kids were right across the street at a park. That nothing could happen to him because he's not alone and he's certainly not in any physical harm.

"Well, the day of the funeral was when the lawyer swung by my parents house. At the time, I was under the assumption that I'd be taking some time off to take care of my family and process what happened. Then, he served me with her will that stated I was to be the guardian of her children. After I had moved in to her house under the request of the will, Chris' lawyer came by to say basically the same," He retells the situation, "My whole life had flipped upside down. I'm now taking care of them so I haven't really had the time to fully understand much of what happened, I guess? Don't get me wrong, I love those kids and it's not their fault. It's just, I was so busy enrolling them into therapy and taking Sophie to her doctors appointments, I really didn't time for me."

As he talks about it, Dr. Gerber nods along. His eyes never leave the former sergeant in front of him, who was now fiddling his hands anxiously.

"I think you actually understand yourself quite well, Soap. You're probably right that you never processed fully because everything happened so fast. What event made you realize this?" Dr. Gerber places down the notepad now, directing his full attention onto Johnny. The moment he's asking about definitely wasn't his finest

moment. He slightly feels the overwhelming urge to cringe at the memory.

"Simon had found me on the kitchen floor with a bottle of scotch and a family portrait," Soap informs, wincing slightly at the words. At any point, one of the kids could've come down to get a water and seen their uncle a crying mess on the floor with alcohol in his hand. That's not the environment he wants to raise them in.

The therapist nods, face void of any judgement. He shifts back in his seat to a more relaxed position and gently asks, "What were you thinking then?"

It's probably some sort of tactic to make Soap feel less like an ant under a magnifying glass and more like it was a casual conversation. Just two friends talking about life's issues together. He's not so sure that it worked. Still, there's no need not to cooperate. It's not like it's just him anymore. If that were the case, Soap probably would've laughed at Simon and said that he was fine as he was and continue to suffer in silence.

There's nothing wrong with therapy. It's good for you. Johnny just has always felt way too exposed underneath the stares of professionals, as if they could see every nook and cranny that makes him who he is. And for someone who tries to push away trauma with easy jokes or a quick "I'm fine"? They were scary for him. But he has to get out of this weird mindset that he's found himself in.

It's not just him being unable to accept his sister's death. It feels as if he's holding back in some weird feeling of anticipation, not *not* parenting the kids but also having trouble with finding his footing. It's almost like he's holding his breath.

Staring at that front door. Waiting for the knob to turn and some type of answers to his problems being revealed. He's committing to the kids. Just not in a way where it feels like forever. And he can't figure out why. Maybe it's because before all of this, he hardly knew them? Never was at birthday parties or big school events. He only ever saw them for the holidays. So why had his sister chosen him?

"How much I'm failing these kids. They deserve their mother and father. Not some estrange uncle who was gone half of their lives that has no idea what the hell he's doing," Soap chokes up slightly, swallowing down the forming lump in his throat. Dr. Gerber stares at him, a calculating glint in his eyes.

"Parenting children is tough. Is it possible that you're being too hard on yourself? Trying to overcompensate for the thing that they lost in some attempt to be the perfect adult for them to look up to?"

Soap blinks at the man, unable to answer. Was he overcompensating? It's possible. Really possible. He's been chasing the idea of being perfect for so long that he's not even sure when it started. Something tells him that it was way before these kids were even thought of.

As if the man not answering was an answer in itself, the therapist continues, "It's common in these types of situations for a new father to overcompensate for the parents that the kids had already lost. But as far as I can tell, you're doing everything right. You put them in therapy—"

"Woah, woah, wait," Soap cuts him off, waving his hand as he does so. The therapist looks at him in confusion. It was rude what he did, he knows. But there's just one thing that was said that he doesn't necessarily agree with and it needs to be corrected before they continue.

The two men sit paused, Soap's hand hovering in the air. He wets his lips with his tongue before adjusting his seat and saying, "I'm not their father."

The confusion on Dr. Gerber's face deepens which sort of irritates the younger of the two, actually. He's not. Why is that hard to grasp? They had parents. Two of them. They just happened to be dead.

As if finding some sort of revelation on his face, Dr. Gerber laughs out lightly while staring at the ground. It wasn't mocking. But somehow, Soap felt like he said something stupid all the same; even if he can't quite figure out what it was. When he looks back up at him, he asks, "How old are these kids?"

"Well, Leah is five turning six in May. Alec actually turns four in two days. Then, the youngest, Sophie, is about four months old. She was a surprise baby from what I've heard but she's a damn cute one," Soap responds lightly.

There's a thoughtful look on Dr. Gerber's face, reminding him exactly of the way Laswell used to stand over a new mission and she mapped out the best form of attack. Soap awaits anxiously. The verdict of whatever was about to be said to him was going to be blunt and hard to hear. He knew it. Spent plenty of time studying people's reactions, especially Ghost's, to come to this conclusion.

"This is not to upset you, I promise. But do you think that these kids really won't see you as their father? They are so young, John. By the time they're out of the house, you would've practically raised them from birth— Especially Sophie. That's not to take away the work that their birth parents had put in but Leah hasn't even finished her first year of schooling yet."

"They have two parents already... I'm not looking to step on anyone's feet or take over a role that's not mine to fill. That would be disrespectful to my sister."

Something clicks in Dr. Gerber's head at that statement, Johnny can see it on his face. He stands up, straightening his clothes before coming to crouch right in front of the other man. Two sympathetic eyes stare at him through a face filled with a gentle determination and it makes the younger of the man squirm a little.

A hand clasps on his shoulder. Johnny looks at the wrinkled hand for a moment before turning to face his therapist again. The Dr. lets out a breath. Something about his mannerisms reminds him more of an older man giving someone he sees as son advice rather than a professional. Like Price or his dad.

It makes him feel like a kid.

"John," He starts sadly, "They're dead."

Soap tightens his jaw at that. The strange urge to run is back as his brain computes the information. From what? He's not sure. He turns away. His eyes find the playground across the street where he could see Alec and Leah chasing each other around.

The sound of his sister's childhood laughter plays in the back of his mind. Her running on the playground in front of him as they play tag, a face split by a big smile so closely resembled to Leah's. Her pink dress bounces in the wind as the yell of their mother scolding them echoes off his little ears.

He just wants her back. He doesn't understand why he can't have her back.

"John," A voice calls out.

He snaps his direction back to the therapist, who was now squeezing his shoulder blade. Tight enough to ground him but not enough to leave any bruises. He blinks. The man frowns at him.

Dr. Gerber stands, patting him a couple of times before making his way back to the chair and grabbing the notepad off the desk. He scribbles something on the paper. Soap is hardly paying attention, though. The sound of his sister's glee still playing in his mind over and over again like a broken record.

"Next time you're in," The therapist states, "I think we should maybe try something called exposure therapy. Would that be something we could do?"

Soap blinks at him again, not fully comprehending before refocusing his gaze on Alec and Leah. "Sure," He responds back. He's still unsure what he agreed to even as he meets up with Simon and the kids. The sight of the skull surgical mask providing a deep comfort in contrast to the fuzzy sensation in his head.

"How old are you turning today?" Simon asks, leaning down next to Alec. The blond was wearing a tight, black sweater and a nice pair of jeans along with the skull surgical mask that he had been wearing at the park the other day. Soap watches from his place in the kitchen, where he was baking a vanilla cake for the birthday party.

Alec holds up four tiny fingers, giggling at Simon's excited expression. Their hair was styled exactly the same due to the begging that came from the little boy to look like the man that he looked up to so much. If Johnny had to guess, he'd say it's because of their similar personality types. They were both quiet. Sometimes, Johnny would come in to find them sitting in a room without speaking, both choosing to do their thing. Simon looking for jobs and Alec attempting to read.

Leah bounces on the chair she's standing on next to him. "Can I mix, Uncle Johnny?" She asks.

That's a new thing, too. After hearing Ghost calling him Johnny, she had started to too. She immediately made it onto the list of people that he doesn't mind using that nickname. So far it consisted of only those two since Sophie was too young and Alec seemed to feel awkward calling him by "uncle." Instead, opting to point at him and say, "You!"

He distantly wonders if anything Dr. Gerber said about them viewing him as their father was true. Unease curls into his gut. His eyes flick to the entrance of the house but he shakes his head, clearing it away.

This wasn't the time to worry about any of that now. The last thing that Johnny wanted to do was start to spiral in the middle of his nephew's birthday. So, he pushes it away. "Of course, m'eudail," He answers, pushing the bowl and spoon to her, "Try not to get any on your dress please."

"Okay!" She peeps.

There's a knock on the door and Simon looks up from where he was now focusing on blowing up balloons with the helium tank. He goes to stand but Soap gestures to him to sit back down before making his way over and opening it. His knees nearly buckle when the fisherman hat comes into view. "Price?" He exclaims, throwing himself forwards to give the man a tight hug.

Price almost falls backwards as a small "oof" sound escapes past his lips. Then, he wraps his arms around the Scot, squeezing him as if he was afraid to ever let go. "Hey, son," He greets. Soap closes his eyes, letting the smell of cigar fill his senses and lull over any remaining anxiety from just moments before. The relief of seeing the old man alive is something that he couldn't even begin to explain since he knows that Price is out there without any of the taskforce now.

He pulls back eventually, ushering him to come in. Simon is already standing on the inside, waiting patiently for the two to be done with both Alec and Leah standing shyly behind him. Their fists were clutched onto his pant-legs. The blond steps forwards, causing the two children to follow by default.

Price and Simon don't hug, instead shake hands and clap each other's shoulders. Soap has resist the urge to roll his eyes. He knew how badly they both missed each other; witnessed it firsthand the millions of nights that the other veteran in the house had barged into Johnny's room and anxiously told him that Price hadn't answered in a while. Yet, when stood in front of him, Simon can't bring himself to allow a hug. It kind of saddens Soap a bit.

They stay in that position for a bit until Simon realizes the kids are there once he goes to turn around. He puts his arms up in alarm. Then the man chuckles, placing a hand on each of their backs. He lightly pushes them towards Price, saying, "Price, this is Leah and Alec."

The older man beams, taking off his hat and leaning down to their height to seem less intimidating. He sticks out a hand to Leah, as if knowing that if she feels comfortable around him, so will the younger

one. "My name is Price," He greets, softly. She narrows her eyes at him, looking him up and down in a way that reminded Johnny of Simon. It's cold and inquisitive.

For some reason, it makes Price only smile bigger. He glances up at Simon only for a split second before his eyes fall back onto the young girl. Soap wonders if he noticed the resemblance in the action too. She then slowly reaches out, still looking unsure as she grabs his hand to shake it. "Did you work with Si and Uncle Johnny?" She interrogates.

He shifts his eyes back and forth dramatically before leaning in and whispering, "I was their boss."

All tension fades from her body at that sentence and a huge grin appears on her face. She shakes his hand with a bit more enthusiasm and Price sort of laughs a bit at her for it. "Oh!" She giggles, "Why didn't you just say so? You can be trusted."

Then she skips off to continue stirring the cake. Both Price and Johnny turn to Simon with matching raised brows as the blond avoids eye contact with them, pretending to be especially interested in the dirt under his nails. The oldest of the adults shakes his head. Then, turns his attention onto Alec. "And you must be the birthday boy!" He states, "I have a present for you in my car, son."

Alec smiles widely, bouncing up and down on his heels. He cranes his head to look up at Simon, as if asking for permission. The man just nods with a soft gleam in his eye. The little boy abruptly slaps Price's hand away, instead wrapping his arms around the captain's neck. Both Soap and Ghost stare with wide eyes.

That's not what they thought he was asking to do at all. Johnny expected him to drag Price out of the house, demanding to see the said present like any other kid would. But instead he had practically tackled their former boss in a hug.

Price froze for a moment. Then, eased into the embrace and placed his hand on the back of the boy with a gentle expression on his face. Johnny came around to stand next to Simon. Alec pulls away, face filled with determination as he demands, "Outside! Football!"

Then he grabs the man, tugging him outside as Price laughs loudly. Johnny leans in close to Simon's ear, placing a hand on the curve of his back to mumble, "What was that about?"

Simon doesn't turn to look at him, brown eyes still the size of saucers

as they track the two figures leaving out the front door. "Guess he likes him?" He murmurs back, though it's more of question to show that he's equally as confused by the interaction.

"Huh," Soap ponders. He goes to detach himself from Simon but is pulled back by his wrist, causing their chests to crash into each other delicately. He can feel the flush on his face as Leah howls in the background at their antics. Johnny raises an eyebrow while trying to hide how this position is effecting him by making his heart swirl and his head spin. Simon's eyes crinkle. A sign that he was smiling.

The hand on his wrist remains even as the other man steps back to give them some space. "What time are your parents coming?" He asks, casually. As if the event that just occurred was something that was totally normal. Soap refuses to show how flustered he was even if he knows that his cheeks are probably doing that for him.

He answers back, "Soon, probably. Why?"

He watches as Simon shifts slightly and he gets a flash of unsureness in his eyes. It occurs to the Scot of why. He's nervous about meeting them. It's understandable since they've only heard about each other via phone calls and dinners where the other party wasn't present. Plus, Simon is living with them. It's pretty nerve wracking to meet the parents of the people your living with, right? Considering how protective parents are? Right?

"Simon," He breathes out with slight amusement on his face. The former lieutenant tries to school his own features and stand up straighter but Soap can see in his eyes that he's really anxious about it. He continues, "You have nothing to worry about. They already like you since you're helping me and are good to their grandkids. You don't have to impress them. You already have."

He claps a hand on his friend's shoulder and walks back into the kitchen to help Leah. He tries to ignore how that whole moment felt a little more than platonic, instead focusing on wiping some of the batter from the little girl's dress. "Leah," He scolds lightly.

She yells out, "It's not my fault! It's Simon's! He distracted me!"

From the pack n'play in the other room he hears Sophie start to cry at the realization that she's woken up alone. Simon rushes into the room before coming back with the baby. Her dark hair was a wild mess and the pajamas were unkempt from the nap she had just taken. "Looks like someone slept well," Simon jokes, "I'm going to get her dressed."

"Alright," Soap smiles back. He watches the two go up the stairs. Leah has her eyes glaring into his soul as she stirs the contents in the bowl. Again, another look that partially reminded him of his former lieutenant rather than a five year old. He looks over at her.

She does the squinting thing again and Johnny has the odd urge to squirm under the scrutiny. She is literally a child. How and when did this she start to be able to intimidate him? He sighs, "What're you looking at me like that for?"

"You're lying to me. I know it."

He raises his hands, blinking his eyes and shaking his head all at once in shock. The little girl doesn't let up the look despite her uncle's reactions to the accusation. What on earth was he lying about? "Leah," He chuckles, "What are you talking about, wee yin?"

"You and Simon. Sometimes you act like mo-"

Whatever she had just been about to say gets cut off by Price running in and acting fake scared as Alec chases him with one of his foam swords. The boy screams loudly as if he was battling the poor captain. So much was happening all at once and Johnny wasn't even sure on what to pay attention to first. Him and Simon sometimes act like what?

Alec fake stabs Price.

The older man falls onto his knees before laying down on the floor. Leah squeals with delight, running over at the same time he brother does to jump on their former captain and abandon her other project. Also, the conversation where she was very busy accusing Johnny of lying and acting like something. "Careful!" Soap instructs.

Of course, he's ignored. The kids laugh loudly and they try to tickle Price. His housemate comes downstairs, holding Sophie in his arms along with a brush and a spray bottle. The baby flaps her arms, screaming at the top of her lungs and leaning forwards upon seeing her siblings playing with someone. Simon turns to Soap. "Why is Price being attacked on our dining room floor?" He questions, stepping around the event going on to make his way to one of the chairs and sit down.

Sophie again tries to escape his grip so he turns, placing her on his lap in between him and the table. It boxes the infant in. She slaps her hands on the wood loudly, letting out another yell. "Inside voice,

Soph," Simon whispers. Instead of her stopping, she turns her head and plants her open mouth on his masked cheek.

He leans back, eyebrows screwed together in slight disgust as he wipes the side of his face with his sleeve. The baby continues to slap her hands on the table. "What was that?" He mutters.

"I think," Soap responds, pouring the batter into a cake pan, "She was trying to give you a kiss. You know, like how we're always kissing her forehead or her cheek? Babies mimic and they don't necessarily comprehend how to do the action. Just that it's affection they receive so they want to reciprocate it."

Simon doesn't look convinced, spraying the babies hair and gently brushing through it. He challenges, "Are you sure? It felt kind of like she was trying to bite my cheek off and the only reason why she couldn't is because she doesn't have teeth."

Johnny laughs loudly at that, shaking his head. Price stands up from where he was on the floor, the two kids hanging on each of his arms as he lets out a loud and slightly overdramatic grunt. The two are both a giggling mess. They hardly ever get to rough house with an adult because of Simon's nerve damage so they both let the children have fun, knowing their ex-captain will let them know if they're being too much.

He's good at that. He used to do it with Gaz and Soap all of the time. Price is able to stop all shenanigans when it's necessary in a way that doesn't make anyone feel guilty for wanting to have fun in the first place. Speaking of Gaz, he can't wait until he gets here. There's a weird feeling in his chest upon seeing what he's looking at out in the dining room. The kids playing with Price, Simon doing Sophie's hair. It feels like home for the first time since he's lived here.

Still hates the decor, though.

Price lets the kids know that they're starting to hurt him so they get off immediately, which causes a surge of pride in Johnny's chest. He's made sure they understood the concept of aches and when to stop being so rough since they live with two veterans who have an array of old injuries that can sometimes hurt. Especially Simon.

The two run into the living room instead. Soap sighs at that, knowing that Leah has long since forgotten her promise to help with the cake in the midst of all of the things that just happened.

The captain sits across from the blond and the baby. Sophie is staring at the man her eyes big and mouth wide open, tongue sticking out in the process. "Don't get too close, Price," Simon says, "She might try to eat your face like a zombie."

"Simon, I told you she was trying to mimic the affection you give her. That's how they learn," Soap explains, placing the cake in the preheated oven and coming into the dining room. Price observes the two.

The other rolls his eyes, continuing to brush back Sophie's dark hair. Soap sits on the chair next to him. The captain stares at the two men as if they were the best thing that's ever happened to him, his own form of pride. Simon looks at him, raising an eyebrow. Price doesn't explain, just sits back and crosses his arms together.

He takes a cigar out of his pocket and places it on the dining room table before digging in the same spot for something else.

"Anyways, this is Sophie. She's a big fan of putting anything she sees in her mouth so please don't leave any cigars around," Simon notifies before jutting his chin in the direction of Sophie, who was in fact reaching for the product. The captain stops what he was doing just before Johnny himself could jump forwards to prevent the disaster of the infant eating a cigar.

Price hisses out, "Fuck!" as moves the cigar to his other pocket. Simon closes his eyes. Johnny has to cover his mouth to prevent a laugh from coming out at the obvious distress from that singular word. He points to Soap.

"You're laughing now, Johnny. But I'm telling you that word is an extremely easy one for babies to say and like you said, they mimic," Simon tells him, "It's not going to be funny when your parents are questioning us on why she's saying it."

Price's eyes widen as his mouth falls open, looking at the former lieutenant in what can only be described as bewilderment. He is now the one doing the pointing. He turns his attention onto Soap with the same expression, still keeping the finger in place. "That's not Ghost. What happened to Ghost?" He teases.

Leah comes over, asking, "Who's Ghost?"

Johnny stares at her, puzzled. He knows he's called Simon "Ghost" in front of the kids before, even if it's been a while. Maybe they forgot. It

doesn't seem as if she's pretending to not know on purpose in an attempt to be funny.

He feels the other man tense up besides him. Which, is for sure... odd. Usually that used to happen when people *didn't* call him Ghost back when they were still in active service. Price seems to notice too. Simon clears his throat, grabbing the products that he brought downstairs and declares, "No one, love. Can you do me a favor and bring these upstairs? Try to put them back if you can remember where they go but if you can't, don't worry about it. Just place them on the nightstand."

Leah is immediately distracted from the conversation after being given a task. Her brows smoothen out and she straightens up before bounding to the other side of the table where he sat. He hands her the items and pulls down his mask to press a quick kiss on her forehead as he mumbles, "Thank you."

"You're welcome!" She beams, running off. Her pigtails bounce as she goes. Alec decides to follow her, demanding to know what she's doing. Both adults stare at Simon as he repositions his mask.

The blond can see the questioning in their eyes and looks away, allowing Sophie to play with his fingers. He almost seems... Ashamed? He looks up again, gaze hard but without any harshness or heat. It's more determined than anything. "I don't want them to know who that is," He affirms, "Not yet. They're too young to understand that and I hope that one day when they find out, they'll judge me for that rather than get why I became who I did."

Price blinks at him, saying, "Okay. But I don't think you want them to judge you—"

"I do. If they judge me then that means they're better than me. That's all I want."

The sentiment breaks Soap's heart, even if he can slightly understand it. He's not surprised by the fact that Simon plans to be in their lives long term since he said it himself when he first came here that no matter what, he wants Johnny in his life. Which, in turn means the kids. Doesn't mean a little flicker of hope can't become alive in his chest that this whole situation between them could become permanent.

Still, he wishes that Simon wasn't so hard on himself. He became Ghost as a shield. It wasn't just for the military. Even if Ghost was the

best at what he did, that's not all that the call sign was. It was more to him.

"Okay, son," Price murmurs, nodding in understanding, "Won't happen again."

Simon's eyes shine with gratitude as he says back, "Thank you, Price."

The air isn't awkward like it would be if anyone else just had that intense of a conversation. They both recognize their friend's reasoning behind the request that the kids don't know anything of Ghost for now as something completely valid.

What they used to do wasn't pretty. Especially the former lieutenant. They know about the fact that three of the men sitting at this table have served in the military, but they're too little to understand what that means. What they've done to enemies.

Johnny will keep it in mind that Simon doesn't like to be called Ghost around the kids.

Leah comes down the stairs, Alec following her. "Simon! Simon! I remembered!" She calls out, rushing over to the man. Both children pant loudly. Johnny chuckles, standing and grabbing them both little bottles of water out of the fridge before coming back. He cracks them open for the kids.

"Good job!" Simon praises, all tension turning into a radiant grin under the mask, "Knew you would. You're smart like that. Why don't you drink a bit of water, yeah?"

Johnny sticks out the two bottle for the children to take and they both do so without hesitating. They start to chug them. Simon reaches out, stopping them. "You might want to slow down. You're going to get sick," He says. Both of the children listen, putting their water bottles on the table and rushing off to go play again.

Sophie reaches out, knocking one on the floor. Johnny sighs, bending over to pick it up with a mutter of, "That was rude, Soph."

Soph just cheers loudly, bouncing and shaking her hands. When Johnny looks at Price, there's warmth spreading across his features as he stares at them.

Guests were arriving left and right. They had allowed Alec to invite over some of his friends from daycare, knowing that it would help the shy boy ease into the idea of the party. So the four year old was sat on the living room floor in front of Price and Sophie, a little girl by his side.

There's a knock on the door. He pats Simon's arm, breaking away from the conversation they were having with the girl's parents and going to greet the people. On the other side stood his mother and father. "Mom! Dad!" He says, holding out his arms.

His mother smiles widely at him, pulling him into a quick hug. Once they separate, she grabs his face and placed a kiss on his cheek with a large smile. An ease settles in him. "You look tired," She frets, "Are you getting enough sleep? Them kids aren't driving you out of your mind, right?"

"Only a little," He jokes. He steps away from her touch, allowing his father to have his own hug. They didn't use to be so tactile with each other but something had shifted in the old man after Anna had passed. Seemingly wanting to be closer to his children that were still alive.

They themselves looked exhausted. Their usual bright smiles and happy demeanors seemed a bit more muted then usual as the two took in the house. "You didn't change anything..." His mother observed.

"Aye," Soap responds back, "Couldn't. Didn't feel right to."

The older Mactavish man then adds on, "I think you should, John. Can't see how you're allowing yourself to heal if you're surrounded by the shell of the life she used to lead. It's your house, now. You can't allow your home to not be yours if you truly want to be happy. I'll come by to help you. Even get your cousin Marcus off his ass too. Lord knows the lad isn't doing anything at the shop."

"Da', I don't know about that—" He starts to say, feeling slightly awkward about the idea of changing his sister's home. But before he can finish, his mom lets out a squeal from where stood directly next to him, forming her hands into a closed fist on her chest.

He whips around to see what she was looking at, alarm clear in his own demeanor after the woman had screamed like a fucking banshee. Instead of anything threatening, there's Simon standing a little ways behind the family. The blond is tense from the outburst.

His mom, ever the oblivious to any sort of wordless tells, rushes

towards the man with her arms outstretched before forcing him into a hug. Simon somehow tenses even more. He then awkwardly pats her back, obviously unsure of what to do with the affection being granted towards him casually. His mom then pulls away, grabbing his cheeks like she had done to her son moments ago. "Steamin' Jesus, yer a big yin. John dinnae tell us that," The words rush out of her mouth, accent thickening from excitement.

He glances over at Johnny, silently screaming for help. Luckily, the man is feeling generous today. Soap comes up to his mother, placing a hand on her back and telling her gently, "Mom, breathe. Simon can't understand you. He's from Manchester."

He just nods politely at the explanation. The Scot's mother cackles, slapping the blond's chest and saying, "You're big. It surprised me. I expected you to be a wee bit shorter."

"You're going to need to learn," John's dad jokes, hitting Simon on the back rather hard, "Otherwise, you'll find yourself confused during Christmastime when my parents come down to visit the kids."

After the ordeal, they find themselves in the living room where Price stands to introduce himself Soap's parents with a friendly grin. It feels weird. His birth parents speaking to someone that he's long since considered a pseudo father. Gaz also sticks out his hand, "Gaz. This is my girlfriend, Callie."

Soap's mother greets the pregnant woman with a wide grin, saying, "And who's in there?"

"That would be Adeline Joanne Garrick," Callie answers, placing her hands on her belly, "Joanne is a mixture of Price's first name and my mother's name."

Everyone in the room turns to look at Price. The captain was gaping at the young couple, opening and closing his mouth repeatedly until all that came out was a tiny, "What?"

The mother gestures towards Sophie, who was in in Price's grip, wordlessly asking if she could hold her. The man bobs his head up and down, handing the baby to her grandmother before bringing his attention back to the couple. Gaz says, "Yeah. We couldn't give one of you guys all the glory so we decided to give you it to you both."

Not wanting to take away from Alec's birthday party, Gaz brings a hand down onto the captain's shoulder and changes the topic.

Somehow, they start talking about work. “Well, Callie is a doctor so she’s going to go back to doing that at a nearby hospital and I’m going to be a security guard at a nearby shopping center. Not the most glorious job but it’ll bring money in and I’ll be able to come home to my family at the end of the day.”

Everyone makes sounds of agreement. Johnny had personally decided to wait on finding a new career until Sophie is old enough to go to daycare herself and everyone finds their footing in this new arrangement. He doesn’t want to be someone out of the house during her most pivotal moments and he wants to only be a few steps away whenever the kids need him. He just doesn’t see being able to work and continue to do that as something totally cohesive yet.

“Simon, what do you do?” Soap’s dad asks, innocently. The Scot feels the blond’s muscles tighten at the question and he resists the urge to reach out to try to relieve that tension from him. He’s guessing that Simon’s having issues in the job department due to the thing that he had blurted out a couple of nights ago. Technically being dead really reduces opportunities. However, it’s not like they could tell people about that.

Johnny’s about to jump to the rescue with some bullshit excuse when Price beats him to it, “Due to Simon’s time in the SAS, his identity is a bit of a tricky problem. We have to keep it under wraps. He’s not in any sort of danger or anything, I can assure you that your son and grandchildren are safe. It’s just all legality red tape bullshit. You know how it is.”

Soap turns to look at Price the same time the man decides to look at him. Both have the same slightly shocked and accusing glint in their eyes, not expecting the other to jump to the defense of the man next to Soap.

You know.

Johnny changes the direction of his sight first. He smiles awkwardly at his mother and father while Gaz scratches the back of his neck, seeming taken aback by the claim. Price continues, “Both Gaz and Soap had willingly discharged while Simon left due to an injury. Technically speaking, if he gets the corrective surgery he could decide to come back but he didn’t like the risk of what would happen if it went wrong. Then of course there’s always less dangerous jobs he could work under the military but... That was never his speed. We’re just keeping him under protection just in case he changes his mind.”

Soap knows it's a lie. Somehow, Gaz does too. He can tell by the way the ex-sergeant nods quickly at his friend's parents, as if that's just normal procedure. Luckily, they don't press. "Well," Johnny's dad begins, "Why don't you come work for me?"

Johnny happened to be taking a sip from his soda and that had caused him to choke on it. Simon reaches over, patting his back with a concern on his visible features. The Scot holds up his hand, coughing away the burn from gagging on the carbonated drink just moments ago. "Da," He croaks.

"What?" His dad defends, throwing his arms out. He twists himself so that he's fully facing Johnny's housemate, giving him that look. The look that his son had learned from him. It's a smirk, bluish greenish eyes bright with barely concealed hope. The one that Simon always gives in to. The older man shifts his weight. Soap can feel it as he seems to start leaning more into his side.

"Alright," Simon agrees.

"Pure dead brilliant!" His father cheers, clapping his hands together as he does so. The action causes Sophie to giggle loudly, moving her arms around aimlessly as Soap sips at his drink silently.

Simon has no idea what he just got himself into.

Chapter End Notes

Splitting this into 2 parts because I don't want this to be too long and it's starting to get to that point. next chapter which will hopefully be posted later tonight ;)

I hope you guys enjoyed this although not too much happened but this birthday party storyline isn't concluded yet so bare with me please :)

Birthday Parties and Therapy (Part 2)

Chapter Summary

Alec turns four. Sophie has a cake mishap. Ava the flirtatious PTA mom strikes again leaving Simon with no choice but to confront her about her behavior. Price thanks Johnny.

Soap finally says goodbye to his sister.

Chapter Notes

The beginning of this one is fluffy. The end is kind of hard. Good luck besties

Edit: I FUCKED UP THE HTML CODING BUT FIXED IT. LMAO sorry about that 🤦 there was an extra s in the closing tag for strong which messed up EVERYTHING.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“So,” Johnny chuckles, “Good luck working with my dad. You’re a mechanic’s apprentice now.”

Simon looks over at him from where he was watching the kids all playing outback. Gaz and Price were with the children as they were pretending to be airplanes for Sophie. “Why do you say that? ‘Good luck?’” He interrogates, narrowing his eyes.

“Where do you think I got my wonderful personality from?” He cracks the biggest smile that he possibly can towards the blond as panic settles onto his features. To deepen the blow, Soap adds, “I’m actually kind of tame compared to him. He also has the terrible trait that he learned from my mother where he likes to stick his nose into other people’s business and gossip. I love them, don’t get me wrong. But you’re certainly going to have a time.”

He lets out loud laughter as Simon’s face pales even more, almost impossibly so, before wrapping an arm around his waist and pressing their sides flushed together. The door to the backyard opens. The laughter dies in his throat immediately. Simon follows his line of sight, freezing.

Following his parents out back was no one other than Ava and her son. She looks around the backyard, seeming to be searching for someone specific and Johnny has a good idea of who that could be. A hand snakes it's way around his shoulders before it rests on his chest, directly over where his dog tags lay against his skin underneath the tight shirt he was wearing. He also regrets that now.

Ava will in no doubt be staring.

He tightens his grip around Simon's waist in an attempt to say thanks but the man shivers underneath the touch, causing Johnny to raise an eyebrow at him. They were clinging onto each other. Yet, the other man couldn't seem to look Soap in the eye. The pale cheeks were a vibrant red. He didn't have time to worry about that, though. A voice calls out, "John!"

He turns his head to see Ava making her way over to the men. Simon seems to bring him impossibly closer. Admittedly, the arm around Johnny was causing his heart to race wildly. Soap grins politely at her, gritting out, "Ava! What a surprise!"

"Aye!" She confirms, "I was shocked to see you invited me!"

"Actually, Alec made the invite list for his classmates," Simon corrects, tone way too sweet. It sounded borderline nothing like the man he's come to know these past years. Johnny pats the arm around him.

There was a certain undertone in this interaction that Soap obviously wasn't allowed to be involved in. Ava's smile was too forced. Simon had that glare in his eye that would send recruits running for the hills, tears streaming down their faces as they went. But she didn't even blink. "Hey, John. Why don't you give me a tour?" Ava coos.

"Actually..." Soap trails off, attempting to think of any excuse. To his dismay, none comes. The glint of the ring on her finger against the sun catches his eye. "Actually, where's your husband?"

"He left me a year ago."

Well doesn't he just want to put his foot in his mouth? Simon stares at the woman in horror, blinking at her as he does so. Soap feels like slamming his head onto the concrete until he passes out for that one. But then she smiles, "I'm just kidding. He's at home with our other son since he didn't feel like coming."

"Well, I hope he's having a good time. We have to get dinner out so

our guests don't starve. It was a pleasure speaking to you, as always Ava. Come on, Johnny," Simon rushes, already starting to make his way to the house. Johnny nods frantically, following behind the tall man and leaving Ava who was glaring at his friend as if she wanted him dead.

As soon as they're in the kitchen after quite literally running from that awkward exchange, they take a moment to just stand there with their wide eyes locked on one another. Who the fuck says something like that? He might not be the best caretaker in the world but God damn at least he's not like her.

Okay, maybe that's a bit unfair. Who knows what her relationship with her husband is like or why she's chosen to latch onto Soap like this. Either way, it's not right. "Do you think we should tell her husband?" Johnny whispers yells.

Simon shrugs, throwing his hands up in the air afterwards. It's not like she's technically done anything that can be classified as cheating that they have solid proof of. It would be their word against hers. Plus, do they really have the time for that type of drama right now? So much is going on in their life and the last thing they need to do is get involved in someone else's relationship problems but it's still the right thing to do.

Simon's hands slapping against his thighs brings Soap back to the present. He takes a deep breath, pinching the bridge of his nose in between his two fingers as he does so. Johnny slightly tilts his head at him. The blond then states, "It's Alec's birthday. So what we're going to do..."

He walks up to Johnny, grabbing his arms in a comforting manner before continuing, "Is go out there with big smiles on our faces and not let her ruin his day. Because this is about him. Not her. I'm going to ask her to behave herself or leave because I know you can defend yourself but something tells me that she'll take that as a challenge instead. Then, later tonight we will discuss what to do about her and her disrespectful advances towards you. You copy?"

"Copy."

"Good man." Simon soothes, rubbing his arms as he does so, "You stay here. I'll be right back."

Johnny smiles at him. Is he a little uncomfortable? Sure. But he's faced persistent people before that won't leave him alone. In fact, both

Price and Simon have tried to fight a guy in a bar over his harassment towards Johnny. Doesn't make it suck any less.

He watches Simon stalk outside.

He tries his best not to turn into Ghost. He really is holding back as much as possible. There won't be any drama at Alec's birthday party, not on his watch. So he'll remain respectful. If that doesn't work, then they'll try to get her out of here without Alec ever even noticing that something was going on.

Ava is standing in the corner, watching him. As soon as he makes his way up to her, she goes to speak, "Look. You listen here. You guys aren't together—"

"No, you listen," He cuts her off, his tone quiet but venomous, "This is a child's birthday party, not a speed dating event. What you're not going to do is come into my house and be disrespectful to me, Alec, Johnny, and your husband in one go. He isn't attracted to you. You're making him uncomfortable."

He looks around to ensure that no one's paying attention to them. Everyone is off having fun. Well, almost. Gaz and Price are staring at the situation from where they stood. Their stances sort of defensive. They keep glancing at Alec who was running around with Ava's son, a big smile on his face as he giggled. He turns back to Ava, seeing her deflate slightly as the words settled in.

"I will allow you and your son to stay if you can behave yourself but I will not have you causing drama on Alec's birthday. His mother and father just died. It's hard enough on them and if you make it any harder, you're going to have to leave," He continues.

"I'm sorry," She squeaks, "I didn't mean to make John uncomfortable. He just seems like a good guy and my husband hardly pays any attention to me anymore. I think he's cheating and now I'm desperately trying to get back at him. I'm sorry."

Her eyes tear up and he allows himself to feel slightly bad for her. People aren't really the best versions of themselves when they're hurting, he knows that. He lets some of the anger in him die and his shoulders to relax slightly. "I'm sorry about your husband but that's no excuse—"

“To take yours. I know. I’m really sorry.”

Simon freezes, eyes widening. His cheeks heat up at the implication. Both him and Johnny have already explained to her before that they weren’t together but then again there was that whole thing he had just done not even ten minutes ago. He swallows, “He’s not my husband. And there’s no taking him since we’re not together so you don’t technically owe me any sort of apology in that regard. He’s not really mine.”

“But he is,” She snuffles, “And I knew that. That’s was part of the thrill.”

“Okay, again. Child’s birthday party. No drama. Not talking about Johnny and I’s relationship status right now,” Simon explains. She laughs a bit at that, though there’s only a slight bit of humor to it.

Her eyes fall onto him, sincere regret in them. She pushes her hair behind her ear and coughs to clear her throat. “You’re a good dad. Most people would’ve come out here and let their anger get to them but you choose him over your own personal feelings about me. It takes a good man to do that. I’ll wait to apologize to him some other time and I’ll behave.”

Simon shyly looks at the ground, stating, “Not his dad either.”

“Yeah,” She scoffs at that, sarcasm dripping off her tone, “Right. Tell me that in a year when he finally starts to call you dad. Then we’ll see about that one. I can tell how hard it was for you not to say ‘my kid’s birthday party’ while you were calling me out. There’s nothing wrong with them being your kids. You’re doing a great job. Own it. I’ll be uh, with the other moms. Again, Simon, I’m really sorry for disrespecting you because I did.”

Without waiting for a response, she walks away to the other moms and hugs one of them. He catches his friends’ eyes again, concern being thrown his way along with a bunch of unanswered questions. The former lieutenant nods. It was a silent signal that everything was alright and to continue as they were.

He turns back to the house and begins to walk back inside to help Johnny with the food. *“I can tell how hard it was for you not to say ‘my kid’s birthday party...’”*

He halts. The voice in his head making him turn himself towards Alec. The kid was still running around, having the time of his life with the

biggest grin he's ever seen on him. Simon's heart warms.

The realization that the words had been on his tongue is a jarring one. That he has started considering the kids his and Johnny's rather than just Johnny's sister's. It was the early signs of it. It wasn't yet a full feeling, just only starting to bud. An urge to run away takes hold of him, reminding him of the last time that he had a family to worry about.

Alec's face morphs into Joseph's. Joseph running around while Tommy and Beth chased him around, a toy plane that would later be covered in blood in the tiny hand. He closes his eyes.

He won't run. He can let himself have this. No one's coming to hurt these kids, not on his watch. He opens them again to find Leah standing in front of him, worry on the features that reminded him so much of Johnny. The same tan skin, same blue eye, same brown hair... Just so... Mactavish, he supposes.

"Si," She asks, "You solid?"

He can't help but let out a wet laugh as he leans down in front of her. She reaches out a little thumb, wiping a tear that he hadn't even noticed from his eye. "You're crying. Why are you crying?" She questions.

"I'm alright, love," He lies, "They're good tears."

"Good tears?" She asks, cocking her head to the side. He hums an affirmative, bobbing his head up and down as he does so as if it would make the statement true. They weren't good tears. They were tears that came from a horrible memory of grief and fear and despair. She didn't need to know that, though.

He stands, picking her up as he does so. Simon then whispers, "I need you to do me a huge favor."

She perks up, just as she always does whenever given some sort of task that she knows will help. Such an amazing kid. They all were. How could he ever run from them? From Johnny? "Why don't you go get your Aunt Clara to help you set the table. Dinner is ready. Make sure the birthday boy washes his hands too. I have to help your Uncle Johnny get everything together."

She salutes to him. He lets out another humorous sound before setting her down, watching her run off to go whisper in her aunt's ear. Then,

he makes his way back into the house.

“Happy birthday, dear Alec! Happy birthday to you!” Everyone sings. Alec leans forwards, hand clutched into Simon’s shirt to steady himself as he clumsily blows out the candles. Sophie’s eyes are crisscrossed as she looks at the flames, trying to reach out and slap them. Johnny gently grabs her hands, leaning backwards more so that she’s farther away from the fire as he continues to cheer for Alec. Simon helps the little boy make the first cut, hands over top of his little ones as they sliced into the dessert.

Then, he gives him the biggest slice. He ruffles Alec’s hair with a kiss to the top of his head and a, “Happy birthday, kid.”

Alec beams at him before running off to go sit with his friends and brag about how big his slice of cake was. Leah then helps pass out the servings, thanking everyone for coming as she hands out each plastic plate. Johnny snorts at her. “Why are you doing that?” He asks as she hands him one.

“Because it’s polite!” She scolds, “Adults do this with adult drinks on tv. So why not cake?”

Simon cuts into the conversation as he settles down next to the Scot, “Yeah, Johnny. That’s very rude of you. She’s just trying to have manners, which you obviously don’t have.”

Leah turns up her nose, snatching her own plate off of the table and walking over to where the rest of the kids were sitting and eating. Johnny glares at him. There’s no real heat behind the stare, instead the opposite. Despite the features being slightly annoyed, his blue eyes were soft with a look that Simon couldn’t begin to decipher. “You know,” He says, “You’re supposed to be on my side—”

Sophie slams her hand into Johnny’s cake and then tries to place her fist in her mouth. Both men reach out to stop the infant since she’s not old enough to digest any forms of solid foods or sugars yet. (They did extensive research on it.) She blinks at them. Soap struggles on where to put his stuff so Simon grabs it for him, placing it next to his on his lap. The brunet mumbles his thanks before reaching out and grabbing a napkin from off of the fold-out table in front of them.

He wipes the cake from her hand as all the adults around them laugh at the scene. “Gaz, I would stop your cackling. This is going to be you

in about five months,” Johnny calls out. Sophie lunges for the cake on Simon’s lap just as Johnny pulls her away from it. She starts to wiggle in his arms, crying softly in frustration.

“Aww, I know. I’m terrible for this,” Soap coos, standing and grabbing her pacifier out of the little baggy they had on the table to protect it from germs. He takes the object out, placing it into her mouth and causing her to calm immediately.

Johnny’s mom walks over, saying, “Here, John. I’m not eating any cake. You sit down and enjoy your food. I’ll take care of her.”

Soap holds onto the still reaching Sophie, attempting to get her into a position where he can hand her over securely but his eyes never leave his mother. He knits his eyebrows together and squints against the afternoon sun, questioning, “Why aren’t you having any cake, Ma?”

“I’m getting old, John. Have to watch my blood pressure,” She states easily, placing a wrinkled hand on his cheek, “Don’t you worry about me, m’eutial. I’m fine. Give me the wee bairn.”

Simon watches Soap hesitantly hand his mother the baby, not seeming convinced by the affirmations that she was alright. He sits down next to him again. The taller of the two hands him the cake, pulling down his own mask and giving him a small smile that he hoped would come off as comforting.

Soap returns the gesture.

—

It was long after presents, most people having left by now. Johnny was in the living room with Price, updating him on everything that’s been going on in their lives after discharge. Sophie was passed out in the pack n’play nearby. Meanwhile, his parents were cleaning up everything from the partygoers, stubbornly insisting after both Simon and Johnny told them that they didn’t have to. “This is what we’re supposed to do!” His father had said.

“Please, let us help you two out. You’re probably exhausted from prepping this for him. Please. We want to,” His mother had begged.

So, Johnny obliged to it.

In the middle of their conversation, Price did a double take to the dining room behind the former sergeant. Johnny turns. There sat

Simon, Leah, and Alec. He was coloring in a book while the two kids took markers and filled in the spots on his tattoo sleeve, now visible from his rolled up sweater. They were existing in total silence.

Simon's blonde hair was sticking up haphazardly from him running his hand through it after the party had ended. The mask had been thrown to the side now. There was no sign of any stress on his face as he let Leah and Alec put color into the military themed memorial on his arm, turning the dark hues into a vibrant rainbow. Johnny smiles.

Once he spins back to face Price, he's surprised by the wetness in the older man's waterline. His eyes were locked onto the scene in the dining room, as if in a trance over it. He literally almost takes a step away. "Price?" Soap breathes.

He sticks out a hand, hovering and not sure of where to rest. The man snaps his attention back to the Scot. He swallows and mutters, "Need some air." Then walks out of the house without anyone but Johnny noticing.

Should he go with him? What was that all about? Has Price ever really cried in front of any of them before?

Johnny then decides to follow, slipping out the front door behind Price. The cool night air hits his body, sending a shiver down his spine from the contrast of the temperature controlled house. The captain is sat on the porch swing, rocking back and forth as he lights a cigar.

Soap takes cautious steps towards him. Price stares out at the Scottish countryside and the peacefulness that it brings. The younger one of them wraps his arms around himself, attempting to shield himself away from the chill of the night. "You alright?" He asks.

Price holds out a cigarette pack, not responding to the question. He lifts up his hand. The man raises a bushy eyebrow at him so Soap explains, "Both Simon and I quit. Not good for the kids' lungs. Sometimes, if we're super stressed we'll get a vape to share and only use it out here."

"What's the difference between that and a cigarette?"

"We don't want them smelling like smoke," Soap grunts, sitting next to him, "That doesn't leave a lingering scent. Again, not that we're doing it in front of them but..."

Price just nods, sort of chuckling to himself. They sit in the quiet,

staring out at the lights in the distance of a nearby neighborhood. "Responsible," The captain observes, "Never thought I'd say that about you."

Soap shoves him lightly without any real intent of being harsh. Then, he growls, "Get tae fuck, sir." The man takes a drag of the cigar, blowing out the smoke afterwards into the night. He seems lost in thought. His eyes scan over the area without reasoning as if something around them could answer whatever it was that his brain was focusing on.

"I never thought I'd get to see Simon like that either," Price sighs, voice shaking slightly, "Throughout the entire time that I have known him, he was a cold man that pushed away anything and everything that got too close. But I was a stubborn bastard. I wasn't going easy. Deep down, I could see he had a heart. There was a man under the mask."

"One that had seen life's horrors and consumed it, became it. It protected him. You can't get hurt again if you only expect that life will provide you that, right?"

Soap listens intently. There were tears building up in his eyes yet again, breath coming out uneven as he moved his hand around while speaking.

He picks back up, "He told me about his life. About everything. I helped him back into the military and gave him a new purpose, trying to help rebuild Simon Riley. Instead Ghost was what I got. I could never complain about it, he was damn good at his job. Part of me always wondered if Simon still even existed. Then, there came you."

Price locks eyes with the Scot. His lips tug up into this sort of melancholy happiness as Johnny stares back at him with nothing but interest on his face. "An annoying Scottish bastard with a heart of gold. Someone who never feared him. You weren't ever looking for Simon because you already saw him. You made him see him too. Now, I get to see the man that I always feared would be in a body bag with no family one day get everything I've ever dreamed he could have."

Johnny swallows the lump forming in his throat. Price aggressively wipes the moisture off of his own face before pulling the cigar between his lips. Hearing someone else confirm to him that somehow he had managed to bring Simon back was something that he didn't know he needed to hear. It pulled at him in the best way possible.

Price then states, voice cracking, "I can never begin to thank you enough for that. I see all of you as my sons in some sort of way but Simon was the one that I worried about the most. You gave him something to cling onto. Even before these kids and this house... I don't think you'll ever fully understand what you mean to him."

"You know, I need him more than he needs me," Johnny deflects, "He's been a great help."

"That's not true. Without you, Simon would've died. He's told me that. Don't you for one second think that you need him more than he needs you," Price asserts, tone strengthening with every word. Johnny just gapes.

He would've died without Johnny? What does that even mean? Most of the time, as a soldier, you need a reminder of what you're fighting for. Who you have waiting for you to come home so that you can power through and cling onto life as it slips through your fingers. Ghost always acted like he never had that.

Yet, here their former captain is on their shared porch, telling Johnny that Ghost did. And it was him. The admission is hard to believe. There's no way that it could be true. The implications behind it were simply too great to even begin to entertain. Sure, the two were close. They were best friends.

Maybe Johnny is in love with Simon. Maybe Soap was in love with Ghost. But there's no way that on the most grueling missions that they had faced, Simon picked himself off the ground with his face flashing through his mind. There's no way.

But Price silences his brain again with a sudden hug. Johnny immediately reciprocates it. "Thank you," The man whispers. All Soap can do is just nod, thick emotion taking over his entire being at the moment.

Once they're pulled apart, Price stands. "I gotta get going son," He sniffles, "I'm going to go say my goodbyes. You take care of yourself."

"Aye. Don't be a stranger."

"Wouldn't dream of it," Price replies. They both grin at each other for a moment before the captain makes his way back into the house. He can hear children happily screaming upon seeing him him before the telltale signs of their disappointment at him having to leave. He turns his gaze onto the countryside.

Tw // car accidents for this portion. Will let you know in bold letters when it is safe to read.

“So, he had a good birthday?” Dr. Gerber asks, eyes not leaving the road as he does so. Soap turns his gaze to the therapist, scoffing in amusement at the question.

“Aye. He wouldn’t stop buzzing about it the past week,” Johnny responds, “Other kids are starting to get jealous from what I hear. I don’t care, though. Kid deserves the best, ye know? It’s the least we could do.”

The older gentleman just hums in agreement. Johnny taps his fingers on the control panel next to him as he stares out the window, anxiety eating at him. He’s not too sure what is going to happen during this session but Dr. Gerber had told him that it would probably help him come to terms with what happened.

Soap doesn’t really understand how.

The road starts to look a little too familiar and he twists in his seat too look at the name of it. His heart drops. This was the road. The one that he tries to desperately avoid, even if it’s a shorter route to his home from the main town area. It adds more time to his day but it was way better than what would happen if he had driven down this way. This hellscape of a road.

The one his sister died on.

“Dr. Gerber,” He murmurs, “Why are you taking me here?”

The man doesn’t look at him, a grim expression on his face. He sighs. Then starts to clarify, “You’re in denial, Mr. Mactavish. I realized it once you stated that you were going to be stepping on her toes by allowing the kids to see you as their father. Realistically you know that she’s dead but it goes way deeper than you just not coming to terms with it. Part of you expects her to come back. Have you been here since—“

“No,” John cuts him off. He swallows thickly, grabbing at his seatbelt with a white knuckled grip. His eyes frantically jump around the area, as if somehow his sister would be sitting on some rock on the edge of the road waiting for him.

“I’m hoping that once you see where it happened, it’ll finally click into place that she’s not coming back and that you and your family need to find a way to move on. Without her.”

He pulls the car to a stop. Johnny looks around the area, seeing some structures on the side of the road a little ways up. His heart stops. This was it. Dr. Gerber turns the hazards on, facing him, “I’ll be with you the whole time. Do you want me to come with you? We can wait her as long as you need but I do think that this will help. I’m not going to lie, it’ll suck. But in the long run, it could help you come to terms with what happened.”

Johnny nods, saying, “Come with me.”

Both men make their way out of the vehicle. They walk in heavy silence up to where it had happened. Johnny leans down as he walks, running his fingers along the tire marks scorched into the asphalt. There’s glass still in the grass nearby. Instead of the image of his sister playing in his mind, he pictures her car losing control after being struck.

He follows the tire marks to a ditch, slowly bringing up his vision. There, where the car had obviously impacted due to the marks in the grass were two of those crosses that you see from car accidents. On them were their names, scribbled in. There were stuffed animals and flags from the college she had attended. A construction hat for Chris.

Then his eyes locked onto the framed image leaning against the base of the structure. His sister, smiling up at him surrounded by tire marks and ruined grass and glass. His brain had seemed to finally catch up at that moment, piecing together what must’ve happened and that there was no coming back from it. That she was gone.

His knees wobbled beneath him before they hit against the mud as he lets out a loud, guttural scream. It was so full of pain. Every emotion that he’s pushed down these past four months finally boils over as he stares at the memorial. All of the heartbreak. The grief. The anger at the man who took her by making one stupid mistake.

Everything.

“Why?” He demands through his sobs, “She had so much more to live for. And now I’ll never see her again? Just like that?”

His therapist comes up behind him, saying gently, “I can’t tell you why it happened. Just that it did and that whatever you’re feeling

right now is what you're supposed to feel."

A hand lands on his back. He falls forwards gripping at the grass with shaky hands as all of the memories in his mind play at once. Their laughter together, their fighting, everything. Their best times along with their worst times. The way she glared at him upon telling her that he was going to enlist followed by her snapping, "What if we lose you? Then what am I supposed to do?"

It's cruel that he lost her first.

They all simmer down to a steady buzz as he sits up again, heaving violently with tears streaming down his face. The feeling of despair fades. Now, he stares numbly at the memorial. The hole that she has left behind less demanding of its presence being filled, now instead content with remaining there with nothing but old memories. It no longer begs for new ones.

He understand that she won't walk through the door again. That there is no stepping on her toes or disrespecting her by raising her kids after she put into her will that she wanted him to. That changing the house that she had kindly gifted to him upon her passing wasn't at all something she'd hate him for but would rather want him to do.

She had placed her life all together in a tightly tied bow, handing it off to him with a peaceful, "It's yours now. Make the most of it."

He couldn't live in her shadow because he could never be her. She was the radiant sun that lit up everyone's lives, guiding them throughout their darkest moments with nothing but care. But now she was gone. There was nothing they can do to change it.

There was no figure dancing around him in the kitchen or the child version of her looking back at him. Those were just memories. Every knock on the door was someone else. It will never again be her. Holding onto her was doing no good. His sister would want that. So, he inhales deeply.

The smell of dirt, grass, and a slight tinge of gas fills his nostrils. He knows he'll never forget it. He clings onto that aroma, knowing it's reminding him of what was lost in this spot. Never to come back. Then he breathes out. The numbness turns into understanding.

The realization that his sister was never coming back set in. Now, he's going to need to get himself off of the ground and try to live a life that he could be proud of. Not her. No matter what he's done in his life,

she's been nothing but that. So why would it change now?

He rises.

—

SAFE.

Dr. Gerber parks in the car park again. The ride back to the office had been silent as the acceptance finally eased into Johnny's being. The world itself looked different now. It was one where he wasn't constantly searching for the faces of the dead in hopes they'll tell him what to do.

He slowly removes himself from the car again. His limbs feel like jelly, exhausted from the session's events and his throat feels scratchy from the screaming. He places one foot in front of the other. Little steps. Once he looks up, he sees Simon leaning on the therapy building's brick wall.

Once the man had heard about him doing exposure therapy, he had gently informed him that the kids will probably have to babysat by Gaz and Callie for this one. At the time, Soap hadn't understood. Now, he does.

All of the emotions surge back up upon seeing Simon standing there. For a long time now, the former lieutenant had been his main source of comfort in this fucked up world so he supposes it makes senses. Dr. Gerber calls out to him. Johnny hadn't even realized that he was running to him until he crashed into his open arms with a loud sob. Two arms held him in place. A hand started to run through his hair and that gruff voice whispered quietly, "I know. It fucking sucks."

"She's not coming back," Johnny wails. They are now rocking side to side. The smell of gasoline leaves his nose, instead being invaded by a slight wood aroma along with something so obviously Simon. It calms his aching heart.

"No, Johnny," The blond shakes his head, gently whispering, "She's not."

"I wanted her to come back. So bad."

"I know."

They stay there in that position for a while with Dr. Gerber standing

some ways away, watching the scene in front of him. Johnny can't see him. But he can certainly feel the therapist's calculating gaze on the two men. But he can't care right now.

All that matters right now to him are three things. His sister is gone. The kids. And the man holding him as if when he'd let go, Johnny would shatter into a million pieces. Which, maybe isn't too far from the truth. A gentle kiss is placed on his forehead. He closes his eyes, the tears finally subsiding as he calmly remains in that spot. In Simon's arms where all of the pain seems a bit more bearable and the ghost of sister finally backs off so they both can finally be at peace.

Chapter End Notes

I really hope you enjoyed this chapter. It's the last angsty one in a while. As you can see, both Simon and Johnny are starting to realize that they aren't just caretakers but parents. In their own ways separate from each other they have this big revelation about their futures along with their pasts.

Things should start finally moving now. Maybe. They're both so stubborn though, so no promises.

I hope that moment where Johnny goes back to where it happened doesn't trigger anyone. Admittedly it kind of reminded me of my own trauma and revisiting the site of where a friend of mine passed in an accident. I think that's how I finally realized he was gone too. If you ever need anyone to talk to regarding the loss of a loved one, don't be afraid to reach out to me or friends and family. That shit is tough.

Anyways hope you enjoyed the chapter. Much love to you guys for all of your kind words. It's making me so excited to continue this story. If it wasn't for that, I'm sure it would've been lazily done or dropped by now. You're just as important to the story. Thank you for being here. :) ☐☐☐

Moving Forwards

Chapter Summary

House renovations. Separation anxiety.

Chapter Notes

My moms birthday was today so I haven't had the chance to answer comments from the last chapter and this one's a bit jumpy and shorter than usual. However, tmr we should be back into the swing of things and I have a huge plotline planned for the next chapter.

I'm exhausted so I will read all and respond to all comments tmr.

Hope you still enjoy it!

Simon and the kids watch Johnny pace back and forth, chewing on his nails in the process. Sophie was in the blond's arms, tracking her uncle's movements. They were all in the dining room after the Scot had asked if they could all discuss something but so far it's consisted of him pacing for about three minutes now.

No one said a word. They were allowing him to take his time, no matter how much he needed. This past week has been rough on him after his last therapy session as seems as if the grief finally hit him full swing. He still got up and do what he needed to do but every member of the house could tell that he had been struggling. Alec had asked Simon about it.

Johnny had left the room with a ruffle to the young boy's hair and a light kiss on his forehead. The man's eyes were dull. His smile didn't quite reach his eyes and Alec had waited until he left to go start dinner to turn to his other caretaker and ask, "Sad? Why? Why sad?"

He had then clambered himself onto Simon's lap, looking at him with his worried blue eyes as he gripped at his shirt. Simon took a moment to think. He had then told Alec, "Sometimes, adults get sad just like you guys do. But he's going to be alright, love."

"Okay," Alec had responded. Then left Simon to grab his coloring book, holding it up flimsily in front of him and demanding, "Rip out? Rip? Make happy? Rip out?"

The picture that he had asked him to tear out in an attempt to make Johnny happy now hung on the fridge, visible from where they sat. It had worked at the time. Alec makes eye contact with him while Leah sits patiently with her hands folding in her lap, kicking her feet. Soap finally sits at the head of the table. "Okay," He sighs, "I wanted to talk to you guys about something today. This is an open discussion and whatever you feel about it is okay."

"Okay, Uncle Johnny," Leah replies.

"Alright," Johnny begins, holding out his palms. The two little kids consider that a sign that he wants them to grab his hands. So, they do. Sophie swivels her head around to look up at Simon from where she sat on his lap before turning and hitting her palms against the table again, babbling slightly. Soap continues, "I would like to change the house. I know that this could be hard for you and I wouldn't make that decision without feeling out what you think first. If you don't want me to, I won't. This is your home. I want you to feel as comfortable as you possible here."

Leah squeaks, "Why do you want to change it?"

Johnny makes eye contact with Simon, who nods at him to continue. The Scot takes a deep breath, leaning downwards to her height slightly as the little girl tilts her head at him. "Your mommy," He begins, voice shaking, "Was my sister. I love her so much and I miss her dearly. But at some point, we have to figure out ways to move forwards and try to..."

He trails off, searching for the correct wording while Leah starts to tear up at the mention of her mom. She doesn't look angry. Or really, all that sad. Simon can tell that she's trying to really hear her uncle out on this, even if it hurts. Johnny locks his eyes with her again, saying, "Find closure."

"Closure? Ms. Hannah says that word sometimes. She told me it means to find peace in what has hurt us and move on," Leah informs him, lip bobbling slightly as she does so. Simon reaches out to her, rubbing her back in a comforting manner.

Soap confirms, "Yes." He squeezes her hand, turning his attention onto Alec and repeating the motion as the little boy pouts.

"I don't want to move on from Mommy and daddy," Leah whimpers. Johnny lets go, scooping her up into his arms and holding her. She cries. Simon's heart breaks as he watches the scene in front of him

while Alec comes up to Johnny, wrapping his little limbs around the man. He readjusts himself to hold both of them.

"I know. That's why I wanted to talk you about it first," Their uncle tells her. Simon feels hopeless in this situation because he understands both sides. He knows how Johnny feels about living in a house surrounded by his sisters stuff. Nothing feels like his. But the kids have lived here their whole lives and it's more of a happy reminder of their parents than a sad one.

And he knows Johnny will choose the kids' feelings over his own. He'll eat it to ensure that they're alright. There is no just doing it anyways and it's one of the things that he loves about that man, even if he wishes that he wasn't in so much pain.

Simon knows when to step in and when to stay back. This was one of the moments where this decision was completely out of his hands. He has to let the three of them come to their own conclusion since at the end of the day they're the ones experiencing this. If they ask for his opinion, that's different. But if he steps in to defend Johnny's point of view, it'll only make Alec and Leah feel as if they're being ganged up on so they might just agree to something they're not comfortable with; but if he sides with the kids then it'll make Johnny feel as if he's being overdramatic.

But neither of those things are a good outcome. And as said before, he understands both parties involved wholeheartedly. "You don't have to make any type of decision now," Johnny mumbles to them, "You just let me know what you think whenever you're ready and I'll accept whatever answer you give me."

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"I don't know. I feel like I just opened up healing wounds in them by asking for their input," Soap groans, rubbing at his face, "But I didn't want to just not consider how it would make them feel."

Dr. Gerber tilts his head forwards, listening. When he realizes that the man had finished his thought he leans back, keeping direct eye contact with him as does so. "And what does Simon think?" He prods.

Johnny breathes out, "He says that I'm doing the best that I can. That he can understand where both of us are coming from and I'm just going to have to be patient."

The therapist's lips pull in a satisfied line, eyebrows shooting up

higher on his forehead as they do so. He schools his expression again. "Well," He sighs, "I think that he's right. You've been doing nothing but the best you can this entire time while also keeping the children's emotions in consideration. And they can see that which is why Leah was comfortable expressing that she wasn't quite ready to move on."

"That means that you're teaching them good emotional control and they'll be more empathetic and understanding. I agree that it could've opened up some wounds but it's better than you changing the house and subconsciously telling them that how they'd feel doesn't matter to you. You did the right thing."

"And how do you feel about that, Leah?" The therapist asks, handing her another marker. Leah stares down at the paper, scribbling some grass on the sheet. She shrugs.

The woman frowns at her but doesn't push. Leah sighs. Leah doesn't know how she feels. Why does Uncle Johnny want to change things? Isn't everything working? She thought that he was happy. That they were all happy. How could her mommy's stuff make him sad? She doesn't understand.

"How do you think Uncle Johnny feels?" Ms. Hannah inquires, "He's thinking about how you feel so have you put any thought into how he does?"

Leah puts down her marker, staring off into the distance at that question. She has but she doesn't quite get it. She knows that for the past week or so, her uncle hasn't been himself. Very sad. Simon says it has to do with how he misses mommy but she doesn't see how changing around the house could make it better. "I know that he's sad."

"Right. You know, it's alright for you to want to cling onto the memory of your parents. There's nothing wrong with that," She soothes, "But do you remember how we talked about closure and moving on? It seems like this is your uncle's attempt at doing so. Moving on doesn't mean forgetting, Leah. It means continuing on life despite what's happened and not allowing yourself to be trapped in it."

"Your mommy and daddy will always be with you, no matter what the house looks like. But maybe he's right, aye? Maybe it might be best to start over."

“But how could mommy’s things make him sad?” She interrogates, “He says he loves her but then why does her stuff make him sad?”

Ms. Hannah sits next to her, placing a hand on her back. Her soft brown eyes stay on Leah’s face as she starts to explain, “Because she’s not here anymore to use it. Sometimes the things that people leave behind can provide a lot of comfort but then other times, it only keeps us in that sadness of them being gone.”

Leah thinks on that. She remembers how it feels to walk into the door every day and not see her mom on the living room couch feeding Sophie. Or how awkward it can be to see uncle Johnny in her parents’ bed after she’s had a nightmare and needs to wake him up. Or how it feels seeing Simon cooking instead of her father while using the same stove that once belonged to them.

And then she understands. Finally, understands. The pit in her stomach when they’re curled up watching a movie on the couch and she just wishes that if her parents were there too. “Starting over,” She mumbles.

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Johnny’s laying on the couch, watching old reruns of some cooking show since he couldn’t sleep. It was about ten at night and he had attempted multiple times but no avail, thoughts running wildly in his head every time he had even tried. He frowns.

Then, two pairs of tiny footsteps come around the corner. He turns his head to see Alec and Leah standing there in their pajamas, eyes squinted against the harsh white light. He pauses the tv. “What are you two doing up?” He asks in a soft tone.

The two pad their way over to him. He expects them to stop in front of him but instead they climb on top of him, each burrowing their way into his sides. Leah speaks first, “This is your house too, Uncle Johnny.”

“You need comfortable too,” Alec yawns, adding onto his sister’s point. Johnny felt like he could cry. Some relief makes his way into his being and he finds himself relaxing all of his muscles. A weight comes off his shoulder that he didn’t even know he was holding.

“Okay,” He states, placing a kiss on both of their heads, “Are you sure?”

“Aye,” The both answer simultaneously.

“But!” Leah suddenly says, “I want to paint my room pink! I don’t like it now. I want pink.”

Johnny chuckles at that, nodding to her and telling her that they could arrange for that to be done. They talk about all of their ideas for the house together as the night goes on and eventually, they fall asleep. All curled up on the couch together where Simon was sure to find them in the morning after he had a moment of panic.

A few days passed and they had arranged for Soap’s father to come by to help them in their remodeling process. Simon was over the moon at the thought of finally being able to do something that required physical lifting. They had been having Callie and Gaz watch Sophie throughout the week so that they could run to the hardware store and pick up new things for the house.

The carpet was being ripped up and replaced with hardwoods but that’s going to be done while the kids were at school during the week as they didn’t want them to be in the house while that was getting done. The kitchen is going to be retiled, the counters getting replaced with a black marble rather than a white, and the cabinets were going to be replaced with dark brown wooden ones.

In fact, most of the kitchen the kids decidedly won’t be home for either. Too dangerous.

The whole house was getting repainted this light beige in attempt to bring make it feel a bit more on the homey side. Of course, Simon had agreed to it. Sometimes the white walls and the grey carpet used to hurt his eyes, too much brightness in the morning. He wasn’t knocking the style. He just personally felt as if that wasn’t them or who they were as people.

He’s noticed that Johnny doesn’t like bright spaces, instead opting with a yellow toned light rather than a white one. When asked about it, he just shrugs and says, “I just like the feeling of dark colors and yellow lights. Something about it feels cozy.”

They had decided to keep the couches since the current ones were big and fit the aesthetic that they were trying to maintain. There would be accent colors that consisted of tan and white in things like blankets or throw pillows and furnitures. By the end of the planning, they were

quite happy about the idea that they had. Simon thanks everything in this universe that the two had seemed to be really smart about saving money when they were in the SAS.

They didn't change the bathrooms, however. Both deciding that that didn't matter too much.

Soap's father, who he learned was named Clyde, was helping Simon and Johnny bring in some items. However, it got to the point where the man had told him that he was fine and to start painting. Leah and Alec wanted to help with that so they were allowed to stay to paint before their grandfather would take them back to his house where the youngest currently was. Then, they'd work on the kitchen and dining room.

That's how Simon got here. Music played loudly as he leaned against the archway, watching the kids and Johnny dance along to whatever song was playing. The blond had his arms crossed over his chest. The three seemed to be moving in slow motion in his eyes. Covered in paint and old clothes, a light behind them coming in from a nearby window making them look like something out of a movie slideshow. Serene. Happy.

The giggles echoed through his eardrums and the smile plastered on Johnny's face smoothed out any bad memories at that moment, being filled with them only. As he twisted and bopped around, the Scot's longish hair bounced about. Just for a moment, it reminded him of the man before all of this. The one who would try to convince Simon to dance with him in bars, not stopping until his legs practically gave out.

Those blue-green eyes found their way onto him, crinkling slightly in the corners as a laugh came past his lips. He turned his attention back onto the kids, twirling them both around by their connected hands as the eldest of the two siblings sung along to the song. Everything felt quiet. In Simon's ears and his brain.

He was perfectly content where he was. In fact, he could stay here forever. If there was a moment in his life where he was going to die, this is what he would replay over and over again in his head. Them. Happy.

"Hey," A voice greets. Everything speeds up once again and all the sounds come rushing back to his ears. Much to his dismay, Johnny and the kids were now back to dancing in a regular speed, the little

trance of content he had found himself in totally broken. He blinks, shaking his head aggressively.

He faces his attention to where the sound of the voice had come from. Right next to him. Clyde stood there, observing eyes darting from his son and grandchildren back to Simon. He grins suddenly. A look of realization had spilled onto his features that reminded the lieutenant so much of Johnny. That definitely couldn't be good.

"You're in love with my son," He whispers, leaning in enough to where only they could hear it. Simon could feel his cheeks grow hot as he reaches up and pulls at the hat on his own head, adjusting it slightly. He coughs.

Johnny raises an eyebrow at the two but doesn't ruin the kid's fun. Simon smiles at him. The other man returns the gesture with glee. The little interaction caused his heart to pound loudly in his chest at an almost concerning pace. He almost forgets that Clyde is there until he continues, "You gon' do something about it?"

What like travel all the way from a military base that's hours away just to come raise children with the man he had swore was no different than anyone else to him? Like tell off a woman flirting with him at a birthday party? Not just any birthday party, one that was for a child that they're both somewhat raising. Or kiss his forehead? Wait outside therapy appointments for him?

"No," Simon sighs, "I'm waiting to see if he'll come to me. Johnny is too important to me for the risk of putting my feelings out there too much and losing him. He's never not gone after what he wants. One stubborn kid you got there."

Soap's father laughs before patting him on the shoulder and making his way over to the group to urge them to get back to work. Leah turns to him, yelling, "Come on, Simon!"

So he follows. Just like he always will. The Mactavish's all have this grip on him that he's not sure will ever let up. But then again, he doesn't want it to.

They paint the house together. Some more singing and dancing happens, some corrections occur. By corrections, he means Johnny and Clyde arguing over the proper way to hold a paintbrush or how to prevent runs. It's something that they've all weirdly seemed to bond over.

Once the children have to leave to stay with their grandparents for the weekend, they do actually throw a bit of a fit. Leah won't let go of Johnny's leg as he tries to talk quietly to her. She keeps shaking her head aggressively and squeezing at him every time he tries to pick her up to put her into the car.

Alec wasn't much better.

He keeps running away from his grandfather, jumping between hiding behind Johnny or Simon. There's a lot of tears. A lot of screaming coming from them. Clyde looks at the situation helplessly. "No!" Leah yelps, "I don't want to go! Not without you and Si!"

Johnny closes his eyes, taking a deep breath and telling her, "Me and Simon need to stay here to work on the house, m'eudial. It's only two nights. We'll be there to pick you up as soon as everything's finished."

"No!"

"Leah..."

"I said no!"

Johnny bends his legs so he's face to face with her, wiping a tear from her face. Simon manages to round up a kicking and screaming Alec that was trying yet again to run off, doing his best not to drop him in the midst of the squirming. As if they had somehow communicated this, he sets down the little boy next to his sister and keeps him in place with two hands on his shoulders. Then, crouches right next to Soap.

"What's really going on here, guys? You used to stay with your grandparents all of the time," Johnny questions.

Leah breathes out in frustration, avoiding eye contact with the two men as she angry pouts at the truck that she was supposed to already be in. She wasn't going to speak. Not unless they try their best to make her realize that they can't help if she's not willing to communicate what's wrong. Simon then insists carefully, "We need to know what you're thinking if you want us to understand. Otherwise, we have no idea why you're behaving the way that you are."

Alec looks over at his older sister. Leah abruptly pushes a strand of hair from her braid behind her ear, afterwards crossing her arms. She faces them head on answering, "I don't want to go. I want us all to stay together. Mommy and daddy are gone. I don't want you to leave too."

Separation anxiety. Something that Gaz had said that Simon suffers with. Which, he said wasn't true but sometimes when he has to stay home while Johnny's out doing something, all the blond can do is stare out the window as every bad thought enters his mind. What if he's hurt? What if they're not coming home? What if they're dead?

It's a hard thing to break and it's even harder to try to calm an episode of it. No matter what is said to you, it'll feel like a complete lie. The thoughts that trigger it will continue to only argue with any type of reason with a quick *"But they don't know that for sure."*

"Listen," Johnny starts, "We aren't going anywhere. I promise. We'll be there to pick you up as soon as we're done with the floor and the kitchen. It's just too dangerous for you to be there while we're doing that, okay? You'll have fun. I'll call you any chance we can. Any free time we get will be devoted to talking to you."

Leah narrows her eyes at him in the exact way that Simon knows he does when he's trying to look for any flaws in an explanation. She had started doing that recently. Just like how she had begun to speak the same way that her uncle speaks or tilt her head with an eyebrow raise like Johnny.

It warms Simon's heart.

After a bit, the young girl seems to decide that he is in fact not lying to her about anything and nods with an annoyed, "Fine!"

Then, they're both giving the children bone crushing hugs and promising to see them Sunday. The two men watch the car until it's far off into the distance before heading their way back into the house to continue the work.

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Later on that night, they're sat on the floor of the dining room with a box of pizza. The tarp underneath them sticks to their sweaty bodies and crinkles every time they move, breaking the peaceful silence between them. The darkness outside peaks in through the totally exposed window not that it's curtains are gone, making the view out front visible from inside. The only light was the chandelier.

No one's mentioned what happened with the kids earlier yet. There really hadn't been the time to properly discuss it as they were redoing flooring all day with Soap's dad. The burn in Simon's muscles felt the perfect kind of familiar, despite his arm feeling as if it was on fire

from all of the work.

He's trying to hide it from Johnny, favoring on using his left hand rather than his right. It's just a little pain. Nothing that he can't handle.

"So," Johnny starts, "Separation anxiety."

"Yeah," Simon agrees. Their voices echo on the empty rooms. The Scot chews on his food, seeming to consider what to say next.

He chooses, "Not that surprising. Guess I should've seen that one coming, honestly. But they're usually fine whenever they're dropped off at Gaz's or school so I'm just a little confused about why now."

"Well," Simon mumbles, getting the crumbs off of his hands by brushing his palms together. He takes a sip of the soda. It's hardly refreshing after the day that they had but it'll do for now as it's more meant for the taste rather than hydration.

Johnny waits for him to continue in anticipation. He picks up his own glass and brings it to his own lips before placing it down on the tarp. Simon winces to himself as he mimics the action. He grunts out, "We're making changes to the house and something you have to consider is that all of those times were just a couple of hours. This is days."

The former sergeant's eyes widen in comprehension at that. Leah, Alec, and Sophie aren't used to not being around one of them at all times anymore outside of things like school or daycare so it's only predictable that they'll struggle with the concept. Plus, that added onto their trauma. It only makes sense.

Still, doesn't make it any less hard on the two men. Simon himself is already missing the little monsters. The house feels a bit too quiet without them and he keeps resisting the urge to go upstairs to check if they're asleep or not. Based on the twitch of Johnny's fingers every once in a while, he can confidently guess that it's getting to him too.

"I miss them," Soap murmurs.

"Yeah," Simon agrees, "Me too."

It's only been a couple of hours.

By the time the house was finally done, they barely even allowed themselves to bask in the glory of their creation. Both of them were too eager to go pick up the kids. Their nights had consisted of them telling stories about the children that they were both there for, laughing at the memories until they cried.

Long gone were the days where their conversations would only be about battle strategy and war. Harsh words trying to direct each other over comms with the sounds of gunshots ringing around them as they both prayed that the other made it out alive.

There's were no more nights where they'd sit over some shitty rations and talk about the future Johnny dreamed of while Ghost listened, refusing to even entertain the idea of a time where his life was anything but this. Part of that still feels like home. Those memories of nights under the stars in a foreign country as he keeps watch over the sleeping sergeant next to him. Hoping he gets that future.

Part of it still feels like home. But the loud, shrills of "Simon! Uncle Johnny!" followed by two pairs of tiny feet running at them and the feeling of their bodies crashing into his for a hug. As if they hadn't seen each other in centuries when it's only been days.

The smell of their shampoo as the blonde buries his nose into the top of their heads of brown hair. A baby screeching and reaching out for them. Simon knows.

He knows that this *is* home.

Firsts

Chapter Summary

Dr. Gerber calls Soap out on some things. Sophie says her first word. Leah also says something for the first time.

Yet again, the boys are stupid.

Chapter Notes

I'm thinking about maybe making the house on the sims and posting it on my tumblr if that's something y'all are interested in??? Let me know :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

After the house had been renovated, life seemed to get a little easier. Especially after Johnny redid his room, yes he's comfortable calling it his now, and was able to finally relax in a space that felt like his own. No Anna watching his every step, waiting for him to move something out of the spot it's supposed to be in or mess up the way something looks. It's now his.

Well, his, Simon's, and the kids. Leah had quickly forgiven them after seeing that they had painted her room the color that she wanted. In fact, gave them big hugs even. Alec was just too mesmerized by how different the house looked, asking questions like, "How did?"

To which Simon and Soap's father would chuckle at before the older of the two explained, watching his eyes grow the size of golf balls. Then, the man had demanded to get a picture of all of them in the new dining room which they all tried to get out of but couldn't.

But all in all; it had paid off.

"I'm glad that it worked out, Soap," Mr. Gerber says, "You and your family deserve some peace."

"Aye," Johnny responds back with a small smile. Therapy had actually become really helpful for him. Without it, he wasn't sure how long it would've taken him to come to terms with his sister being gone or to change up his surroundings to make himself feel like it's his.

His use of the word family rings inside his head. It reminds him of

something that he had actually wanted to talk to the man about. In one of their sessions a little bit ago, he had told Soap that there will come a time where the kids start to see him as their father and it's been haunting his brain since Simon and him had realized that the kids had some separation anxiety from them.

"You had said," He swallows, "That there will come a time where the kids start to see me as their father."

"I did," He confirms, tilting his chin up and down once. Johnny brings his hand to his mouth, biting on his nails as he does while thinking of the way to word this. Dr. Gerber closes his notebook.

It's something that he does whenever he senses that his patient is particularly anxious about a topic, wanting Johnny to sense that his full attention is on him. Yeah, he could psychoanalyse the therapist right back. He was good at reading people too. The time in service made it an important skill to learn. It's partly how Ghost had let him become so close to him since Johnny had a talent of knowing exactly what the man was thinking most of the time.

Most of the time.

He sighs, "The other day, Simon and I had to send the kids to my parents' for the weekend so that we could finish the work that needed to be done to the house. But, they didn't want to go. They started absolutely losing it. I'm talking about crying, screaming, running, clinging— The whole nine yards. Ever since that happened, I've been wondering if it had anything to do with what you said would happen and if it does, what that could possibly be mean for how they view Simon?

"Because it wasn't just me they didn't want to leave. Leah had specifically said that she wanted us all to be together while Alec hid behind Simon. And you should've seen their faces when they had saw us both pull up to the house. Like, they didn't just run to me. They ran to him too. Then sometimes, when Sophie's upset she'll reach for him rather than me— Which isn't something I'm jealous about I just... I don't know."

Dr. Gerber listens to his rant. Then, purses his lips together and thrums his fingers over the notebook cover. Soap hadn't even meant to say that much. He originally had wanted to ask about whether or not they were staring to see him as a parental figure but then had realized halfway through that they treated Simon the same way.

He knows that's not why Simon had started to help him. There's no way the man had meant for them to raise these children together? Surely not. So if they are starting to see him as a father figure along with the housemate then what is there to do? He would never kick him out. But he also doesn't want the man to be accidentally forced into a role that he doesn't want to take. Never intended to. It's scary enough for Johnny to realize that at some point he's going to stop being Uncle John but rather dad, he doesn't want Simon to also fall into that category if it's not something he felt he wanted.

"It's possible," The therapist starts, "That they are starting to see you both as their fathers, yes. I don't think that you're jealous at all. I think that you're scared. You have told me before that Simon is just your friend that's staying with you for a bit but based off the stories that you tell me; it doesn't seem like that's the case."

Johnny stares at the man, dumbfounded. Dr. Gerber groans. Actually groans. That's not a sound that you want to hear your therapist make, ever. But it quickly turns into a chuckle. He leans forward, continuing, "He's not your friend, John. By technical labels, maybe. But not emotionally. At this point, you two are practically a couple and you're definitely coparenting these children together. Whether or not that was the original idea doesn't matter. He waits right outside this office for you, every single day and sometimes takes the kids to the park while he's waiting. When you had come back from the site of the accident, the first person that you ran to was him.

"And it seems to me like when he was in trouble, you were the first person he came to. Traveled how many hours from your former place of employment to Scotland just to be with you? I don't know if you know, but that's what romcoms are made of, my friend. I know that you know that something deeper is going on here. You're not dumb, Mr. Mactavish."

Soap blinks at him. He felt like he had just been cut open and laid out on a table for the whole world to see. Something about the words being said to him tickles at his brain but there's a bigger part of him screaming that it can't be true. There's no way.

It's not true. Simon can't. He just can't. Because how could he? No one else has ever chosen him so there's no way that someone as amazing as him could either. No matter how badly he wants it. "Well, I know there's something deeper going on because I know that I love him," He squeaks out.

“Okay. So you are aware of your own feelings for him. That’s a start. When’s the last time you had a romantic connection?”

Johnny scoffs at that. During his time in the military, he could only be described as a proper dog by some people. Especially in his younger years. Sometimes when things got hard, he’d go out to get absolutely plastered and find a warm body for the night. A temporary comfort.

There was no settling down with someone like him because he firmly believed that there was no future ahead, no matter how many times he talked about it. So he’d leave before the sun came up. How much they clicked or how nice of a time they had would never effect the decision of running from their lives. He was the good time.

Johnny was never meant to be the one that parents gushed about wanting to meet or bringing over to dinner. There was no person telling their friends that they think that he was the one and that they’ll get married and build a happy life together. He was war. He was watching bombs go off with an awed expression on his face. He was the man married to the cause, not as much as Ghost had been but still.

The damage that he had received after it all wasn’t something that he ever wanted to put anyone through long term. Sometimes he woke up sobbing. Other times he’d wake up, curled up in a ball with the ghost of old bullet holes searing into his flesh.

So Johnny wasn’t the one worth staying for.

“Yeah,” He coughs, realizing that that answer made zero sense, “I mean, not too long ago. In the military, I had one night—”

“Not what I mean. When was the last time that you had something real with another person?” The therapist cuts in.

He tries to think back. Never. Throughout his teenage years, he had the same habits. Never settling. At the time, he had thought that he would’ve been a famous goalie and didn’t want to be held back by a boyfriend or a girlfriend— Young thoughts were mean— but then when he realized that he wanted to join the SAS it became that he couldn’t.

“Never.”

“Never?”

“Aye. Never. I mean obviously I’ve had relationships but never one that actually had meaning,” Soap explains.

Dr. Gerber prods, “Why is that?”

He thinks of the current excuses that he had just used but realized that those didn’t feel quite right to him. Because he was doing those things with Simon. He just never could seem to try to push past that invisible line between them, instead opting to stare from the other side of it while the blond looks right back at him. “I don’t know,” He whispers.

The older man frowns at him. It’s not a disappointed one, more like sympathetic. As if he already knows the answer and knows that it would hurt Johnny to hear. Still he says, “As I said earlier. You’re scared. In my opinion, I think you’re quite afraid of commitment even if you don’t realize it. You had originally come to me in to search for help to come to terms with the loss of your sister. Which, happened. I’m not saying you’re all better.

“But we aren’t talking about her now, either. I think a part of you knows that there’s other things that you want to get through. I’m fine with that. I’m here to help you in whatever way you need me, Soap. I’m glad to be of service.”

“Scared of commitment?” He questions, eyes wide, “Why do you say that?”

“Well, despite the will stating that the house was yours you still couldn’t accept it as that. Then, when I had mentioned the kids seeing you as a father, you got defensive. At first, it seems as if that could’ve had to do with your sister and her husband’s passing. Which, I do still think that it largely was. But now, you’re actively panicking at the idea of them seeing you that way even though you recognize that she’s gone and you’re raising them. You’re obsessing over it. As soon as it was shown to you that there’s a possibility that they view you as a parental figure, instead of accepting it you panicked.

“Maybe not in front of them but I can see that the idea makes you fairly anxious. Here, okay. Say I told you that everything Simon has done is a sign that he’s trying to work towards something more with you, what would you say?”

“It’s impossible,” Soap answers immediately. Dr. Gerber gets that look on his face, the one where Johnny can tell he just got him right where he wants him.

“Okay,” He says, pointing his pen at him, “Tell me why.”

Johnny doesn't answer. Why? Just because. It's impossible. He can't be the one that Simon wants to spend the rest of his life with and thinking so would only cause him more pain when it doesn't happen. There's no point. Again, he's not the one people choose to settle down with.

“How many people have assumed you two were together?”

He doesn't respond again. It was a lot, if he was honest. It happens all of the time.

As if the silence was the answer that he was looking for, he leans forwards and looks Soap directly in his eyes. “Even when all of the evidence is presented to you, you can't accept it. The best way to get over your fears is to face them head on. There's nothing wrong with committing to things, John. Sure, there's always a possibility that it fails but that doesn't mean that you don't try.

“So I want you to start facing the fears head on. Leah will probably be the first one to actually call you by the name ‘dad’ in some type of way. Alec follows her lead as he seems to look up to her and is a bit more on the shy side. Sophie has never heard you be referred as that. All odds point to it being her. If she does, I want you to accept it. Commit to the idea of being a father. Not just a caretaker.”

Johnny breathes out. His brain felt slightly jumbled by all of this and he doesn't quite understand how he got here. One minute he was smugly thinking that he could read his therapist just as well as he read him but now he's questioning if there's another issue he has that he's never even considered before. Commitment issues.

Isn't that a kick in the ass for someone that's afraid of rejection? Or maybe, it makes sense. But he can't quite figure out where it stemmed from. “I'm not understanding two things here so you're going to have to explain it to me, doc,” Johnny says.

“Gladly.”

“One, how will me accepting Leah calling me dad help with my supposed commitment issues with Simon?” He ponders out loud.

The therapist slightly sighs at the question, once again leaning forwards and splaying out his hands in front of him. “Commitment issues are often portrayed as a relationship thing,” He begins to

clarify, “But they can be with any sort of long term change. Leah calling you that is going to happen way before you finally accept what’s happening with Simon. Ones in your control, the other is not. I’m hoping that if you begin to slowly allow yourself to be okay with committing to things fully, you’ll start to take action yourself.

“Because it seems to me like Simon knows his feelings and is just patiently waiting for you to take the first step towards something more. He came into your life. So he’s waiting on your terms, even if he doesn’t realize that he’s doing it. Plus, the whole dad thing is the original topic that you asked about before I had decided to go on my tangent.”

Johnny screws his face up in confusion, asking, “How do you know that? You’ve never even spoken a word to the man.”

Dr. Gerber doesn’t even get offended. All he does is stand and grab a framed object off the wall, handing it to his patient. On the paper, it reads **“Certification of Excellence, top 3 marital counselors—DR. TROY GERBER, PHD.”** Which, the man taps his finger over. Soap looks up, way more confused than he had just been before. “I wanted to switch my area of expertise after about ten years doing that. So, I do know what I’m talking about, young man,” He chides with no real heat.

“Touché,” Soap mumbles, handing him back the award. His therapist walks over to hang it back on the spot where it had been before sitting himself back into his seat. Lucky Johnny. His therapist is also a therapist for couples. Meaning that there’s probably some truth in what he’s saying and he just needs to face it. But no. He can’t.

“What else do you have questions about?” He asks, breaking the younger of the two’s trance. What else? Was there something else?

It comes back to him and he claps loudly, sitting up straighter as if he had finally come up with something to finally stump the man with all of the answers. “I have nothing in my life that could’ve led to commitment issues. My parents always treated all of us as equally loved and I never fully entered any relationship throughout my life. The closest thing that I can think of was the times where I was rejected from the SAS but that was due to my age. Not my ability.”

Dr. Gerber doesn’t even twitch. Not even a singular blink. Instead, he questions, “What about how you view yourself?”

“What?” Soap swallows. His face turns paler and he physically feels

his heart drop in his chest at the words. How he views himself. It's him.

"You come off as fairly confident, Mr. Mactavish," The therapist responds, reading him like an open book, "Always doing what you think is best, others opinions be damned. It's one of the first things I noticed about you. I know that confidence can sometimes be a shield for our own insecurities. You constantly strive to be perfect. To never make any mistakes when it comes to the things that are important to you. Then, when you do... It effects you greatly."

He thinks back to how he's constantly berating himself for feeling what he feels or thinking that he's messing up with the kids, despite others telling him he's doing the best that he can. He thinks back to all of the times he had lied about his age on the enlistment forms. Or how he needed to be the best in the field he was in. How he always had trouble with authority.

How even now, he feels like he's in some type of race to a nonexistent finish line. When really, the only opponent against him was himself.

Dr. Gerber now stands, immediately placing a hand on his shoulder. Then, squeezes it tightly. He lets the touch soothe his slight spiraling. Johnny lets out a steady breath, nodding before clapping a hand overtop of the one on his shoulder in a sign of thanks. Soap furrows his eyebrows, thinking on the things learned from the session as the alarm goes off signifying that it was the end of their time together.

It was a Thursday, meaning Alec and Leah weren't home. Simon sat at the table, looking over some paperwork that Johnny's dad had given him on the basics of what his upcoming job would be while the other man was doing the dishes. Sophie was in her little floor seat, grabbing at the toys while stopping to look at the two every once in a while. She lets out happy squeals.

She's now closer to five months which means that pretty soon she'll be crawling all around the place and they'll have to get a baby gate for the stairs. The last thing they need is her falling down them. No, that'll just give them heart attacks.

"So," Johnny calls over his back, "When do you start?"

"I think around the time that you do? I don't know, I just think I'd be too worried about you struggling to do everything while I'm gone.

Don't want to miss anything or make you a housewife," Simon jokes.

Johnny drops a cup, the water running over his hands as his brain comes back online. He turns off the faucet and wipes his hands on his shirt to make his way out into the dining room, seeing Simon sitting there with barely contained laughter on his face. He moves his hand over his mouth.

He stares the blond down, crossing his arms. He could've done this from the kitchen as the two are only separated by a breakfast bar but this was a lot more intimidating in his head. He grumbles, "I'm no housewife."

"Theres nothing wrong with being a housewife, Johnny. Everyone has their way of life and some people want to be housewives which is okay as long as they're safe and happy."

"That's true, but I'm not one."

"Exactly. We both agree on that," Simon looks up, smiling innocently, "And I wouldn't want you to be either. Not unless you chose to do that. I'll support anything you do, Johnny."

Johnny smirks at that. He rests his hip against the countertop as Simon raises a blond eyebrow at him, caution written all over his face. "In order for me to be a housewife, you'd have to be my husband," He teases, lifting up his left hand, "And would you look at that? No ring."

Simon puts his papers down. Instead of the blubbering mess that he had expected to the former lieutenant to be, he's neatly putting together the sheets into a pile again. The sound of them hitting the table seems to be louder in Johnny's ears. He folds his hands together on top of the new pile before coughing and looking up, face nothing but serious as he asks, "Do you want a ring, Johnny?"

Yes.

He hates how quickly his brain had subconsciously answered that question. But he does. And he knows that he wants one from Simon. That would be the dream in all honesty... A life where they could do this, even if not technically legal due to him being declared dead, forever?

His brain unhelpfully shows the Scot images of what the ceremony could look like and how absolutely breathtaking Simon would be in a suit. Leah would be the flower girl. Alec would for sure make a cute ring-

What was he doing? There was no wedding upcoming and he certainly was just saying it to get under his skin. The two weren't even together, for fucks sake. They just lived together. Temporarily, his brain adds to double the blow.

Still, his ears feel hot. He knows that his cheeks were probably a bright crimson color as his mouth opens and closes, unable to form anything coherent at this moment. The man's face goes from dead serious to a devious smirk. Slowly. As if he had been an animal that just realized that this would be an easy catch.

Johnny thinks about being honest. About telling him that that look was sending his mind reeling and that he would marry him today if he had the chance. But the tension broke at a little—

"Fuck."

Simon and Johnny's faces both drop. They slowly turn their heads to the baby in her seat that was now sucking at her own lip, looking at them with her innocent blue eyes shining. "What- what did she just say?" Soap stammers.

As if hearing the question and deciding to answer herself, Sophie repeats, "Fuck!"

The f sound wasn't as strong as the ending but there was no mistaking what she was saying. The thing that Simon has been warning people about for months now had finally come; much to Johnny's horror. It was her first word. And it had been "fuck."

He blinks, mumbling a, "Steamin' Jesus..."

"Johnny..." Simon groans, burying his face into his hands which caused the name to be slightly muffled. In his defense, he had told him. It was like the perfect representation of the two's relationship since the very beginning- Ghost tells him something, Soap doesn't listen only to find out the hard way that he had been right all along.

"Fuck!" Sophie yells.

"Sophie, no," He says sternly, "We don't say that word..."

She giggles out, "Fuck."

"Oh bloody hell, the baby's first word is fuck and she's never going to stop saying it. What is your mother going to say? Oh, the PTA moms

are going to talk about us," Simon starts catastrophizing, placing his head that was still buried in his hands on the table, shaking it wildly. Johnny honestly doesn't know what to do. This was the moment they were supposed to cheer her on and encourage her learning. But instead they had to figure out what the next course of action would be.

Sophie looks around at the distress, brows forming together as she kicks her tiny feet. Johnny scoops her up. "It's fine," He tells Simon, "It's fine. We'll just.. try to get her to say something different."

"Like what?" He growls out, not lifting his head.

"Like... Like up? That's easy to say right? Up?"

"Johnny," The blond slightly whines, bringing up his gaze to finally look at him, "I *told you*. Now look at what's happening. Exactly as I said would. I need to call Price and ask him what to do about this. We're going to be talked about on the towns parenting blog."

Johnny makes a face of disbelief, closing his eyes harshly before opening them and bringing out a free hand. He shakes the limb. Sophie watches the movement, curling and uncurling her fist as she does so and it dawns on the man that maybe she does pay attention to all of his movements. "Wait, wait, wait. There's a town parenting blog?" He asks.

Simon throws his hands up in the air, looking around for a moment as if he was saying 'you're worried about that part? Really?' Which yes, he was. Why was there a parenting blog that Simon knew about and he didn't?

"Simon, it's alright," Soap immediately comforts, placing a hand on Simon's back. The man seems to relax under his fingers, closing his eyes and letting out a breath that he'd been holding. "No one's going to talk about us on some blog. This isn't a sign that we've done something wrong and I'm sure we're not the first people that this has happened to. It's certainly not going to traumatize her. In fact, she may find it funny once she's older. Everything's alright, I promise."

"This is totally your fault. I'm taking no responsibility for this," Simon jokes lightly, pointing to the baby in his arms. Johnny sends him a fake offended look, removing the hand from his back instead to clutch it onto his own chest. Sophie tries to grab at it.

He immediately gives her the limb so that she can play with his

fingers and shake them slightly. Why babies like to do that? He doesn't know. Don't kittens do it too? And puppies? Is it just a baby thing? Huh, the things you think about.

"I'll have you know," He defends, "That I tried my best to not say it in front of her. It's not my fault that she's surrounded by a bunch of veterans and a man known as Clyde Mactavish."

Simon chuckles, shaking his head in amusement at the Scot before turning his attention back to the papers in front of him. A sarcastic hum then comes from his throat. The voice of his therapist rings in his head for a moment as he remembers the conversation they had been having before the first word disaster— Which he's still unsure of how he should feel about that?

"Do you want a ring, Johnny?"

The brunet looks down at the man sitting at the table next to him, focused on the thing he had been working on before. It reminds him of all of the times that Johnny had come into his office and started bothering him for no good reason other than he was bored. His favorite game at the time had been called "how much can I flirt with Ghost before he kicks me out of the room?"

There has been times where he swore he could see how red Ghost would get even under all of that black face paint. He would stammer over his words and point at the door, telling Johnny to leave. Other times they would just sort of flirt back and forth until one of them decided to leave for the night. Neither actually doing anything. Those are the nights when Johnny would lay awake, staring at his ceiling and contemplating on why neither of them would make a move.

That's when he decided that there probably wasn't actually anything between them. That it was all fun. Which, Johnny could be fun. And making his lieutenant flustered? Fear of commitment be damned, he'll always take an opportunity to do that.

The former sergeant smirks deviously. Then leans down directly next to his ear, whispering, "Maybe I would've tried harder if I had a ring, hmm?"

Then goes to saunter off, saying in a high voice to Sophie, "Let's get you ready for the park! We're going to go with Leah and Alec. But you have to promise to keep your first word between us, aye?"

When he's halfway to the steps, he sneaks a glance over his shoulder

to see that the pencil Simon had been holding had snapped in half and his cheeks were bright red. It was such a beautiful look. Finally, he got to see it without the mask.

“I still got it,” He whispers to Sophie, confidently before making his way up the steps.

—

Simon and Johnny sat on a blanket under a tree with Sophie, watching as the two older kids ran around the equipment with loud laughter and smiles on their faces. Every couple of minutes, the infant tries to put her stuffed butterfly into her mouth, slamming it up and down each time she fails to do so.

“So, hypothetically speaking. If I got you a ring, you would actually start to listen to me?” Simon teases, laying backwards so that his weight was supported by his elbows. He was wearing that surgical skull mask but Johnny was sure that there was a smug grin underneath of it.

“Maybe,” Johnny responds, shrugging, “Why don’t you find out?”

“In your dreams, Mactavish.”

Yes. In his dreams. He tries to ignore the way that his brain tries to tell him that this all just lighthearted banter. It was flirting. But the two had always had a flirty undertone to their relationship and it had begun in Las Almas over the comms after the betrayal.

Hell, he called Simon a “good ole boy.”

But nothings ever come of their flirting. It was a way to get through tough times when they were active duty. However, is it still? There’s no danger here. Yet they’re back at it after quite a while where Johnny had hardly even felt like himself. Now that he’s starting to feel better again, it’s coming out again full swing. It feels nice. Familiar. But that brings up some new problems. The commitment issue thing. He refuses to think about any of that right now though, wanting to focus on the children playing and the gorgeous man next to him.

“Actually—“ He starts.

Simon cuts him off, “That’ll do.”

Johnny rolls his eyes at that, turning his attention on the blond only

to find him already staring at him. There's an energy lingering between them again and Soap's starting to really think that Dr. Gerber is right. He's not imagining this.

There's something else here. The tension is so sharp that it can cut through ice. The smile on Soap's face falls as his eyes involuntarily drop to where Simon's lips would be under the fabric blocking them. Sophie, with the habit of breaking up moments like this to Johnny's dismay, throws her butterfly at Simon's head. "Sophie, no!" Johnny says sternly.

The other man loudly sighs, handing the baby the stuffy again before honest to God winking at Johnny and turning his gaze back onto the playground. He swallows, mimicking the last action.

Suddenly, Leah is running over to the little group. Alec is clumsily following behind her, huffing out as he does so. She smiles at them. Then, it tumbles out of her mouth, "Dad! Daddy! Look!"

For a moment, Soap freezes. But then she's dropping onto her knees in front of the men and opening up her cupped hands to reveal a a worm in her hand.

Accept it.

So, he chases away all of the anxiety, leaning forwards to look at the creature that she was holding and saying excitedly, "That's a big one!"

She nods. Then, swivels herself around to show Simon, who brings down the mask slightly to display the big grin on his face. "Good for fishing," He observes.

Leah snatches the worm away closer to her chest with an angry glint in her eyes. The blond tries to hold back a loud laugh at the expression. Alec grabs his juice box and starts to gulp it down in one sitting, making loud drinking noises as he does so before letting out a sigh once finished. "We found it," He declares breathlessly, "On the playground."

"Aye! And he's not being used for fishing! We're putting him in the grass over here so that he doesn't die," She informs, staring pointedly at Simon. The man just raises his hands in surrender. The two siblings then make their way over to the grass nearby, starting to dig into the dirt. Johnny thanks God that tonight was already a bathing night, otherwise he'd be hating that worm with every fiber of his being.

He turns to look at Simon, who's watching him with a calculating expression. He narrows his eyes at him. Johnny just raises an eyebrow in response. Sophie leans forward onto her hands and knees, causing both adults to instead to turn all attention onto her with withheld breaths.

She steadies herself for a moment before falling onto her stomach, looking around. Both men face each other. "Uh oh," Simon mutters. It was genuine. The fear of what is around the corner practically leaking off of his tone. Once she starts crawling, they're in for a world full of absolute chaos. Especially with her personality.

"You can say that again."

"Oh," Sophie repeats, causing both of them to burst out into laughter. Alec looks over at them while Leah continues to dig into the dirt with her cupped free hand. Simon sits up. He let out a puff of air before continuing to have another fit of laughter, throwing his hand across his abdomen as if it hurts. Johnny wasn't doing too much better.

Every single time he thinks it's contained, it bubbles up again ten time worse. They continue howling in amusement. Eventually, it gets to the point where it does start to hurt and he has to try his very best to calm himself down. Simon keeps letting out an, "ow" before starting back up all over again.

Was it that funny? Probably not. It was one of those moments, however, that Johnny could tell he would never forget. He had just been called dad for the first time by one of the children he's raising and *didn't freak out*. Then, Sophie had physically attempted to repeat Simon after Soap had said out loud that that someone should. And now, he's laughing his ass off with the man that he knows that he loves more than he's ever allowed himself to love before. Overall, it's an amazing memory.

They get back home not too long after. Simon washes his hands and starts to get ready to make dinner while Johnny is on bathing duty. Making sure all of the kids get into the bath and clean. First Sophie since she takes the longest, then Alec, and lastly Leah. Afterwards, they sit at the dinner table to do homework while their food for the night is being made.

Alec is playing with Sophie on the floor, telling her all about shapes as she lets out a babble in response every once in a while. Johnny sits next to Leah, helping her read any words that are a little hard for her

to get by sounding it out with her.

Dinner goes smoothly. The kids telling them all about their day and the things they had done with their friends at school. Once conversation dies down, Simon gets Soap's attention. "Hey Johnny? Sophie is about to be five months old, right?"

Johnny hums in response, shoving mashed potatoes in his mouth and forming eye contact with his friend (?). It was a strange question. Sophie babbles again from the corner where she kicks her feet in her walker before slamming down her hand on one of the spinning toys and letting out a delighted scream. He smiles at her. She's always been such a vocal baby and he starts to wonder if that'll carry into toddlerhood.

"So, maybe we should schedule an appointment to see if she should start on solids? It's about that time to start transitioning her onto it and if I can guess about how she's watching your plate like a hawk and the cake incident, she's probably ready," Simon infers. Johnny snaps his eyes onto him before landing them back onto Sophie.

He pouts. It's followed by him saying, "But that means she's going to grow up and I'm not ready for her to do that."

"Well," Simon laughs at him, "It's going to happen whether you're ready for it or not."

Johnny lets out a dejected sound before standing and grabbing the kids' finished plates for them. They both offer to do it themselves but he just gives them kisses on their foreheads, redirecting, "Don't worry about it. Why don't you go get ready for bed?"

He watches them run up the stairs, practically falling over each other. "Careful!" Simon warns. Johnny lets out a little chuckle, placing the plates in the sink before beginning to run the water. He can feel the presence behind him before it even lets itself be known and Johnny has to fight not to lean back into it as he starts the dishes. A hand reaches over, shutting the faucet off.

It stays there. Johnny turns himself around, careful not to brush against the man as he does so. They're standing so close that he could count every single one of those long, blond eyelashes. "Are we going to talk about earlier?" His voice is so low that the Scot is even surprised that he heard it.

But then, panic sets in. Earlier. When Johnny had blatantly stared at

his lips, even if they were underneath a mask. He sticks his tongue out to wet his own lips. Simon's eyes track the movement before snapping back up to catch his eyes again. Soap wants to lean in.

Lord knows he does. There's nothing else more that he wants more than this right now. Could he allow himself to have it? "Earlier?" He whispers back.

"Yeah... The dad thing."

Oh. Right that. Soap wants to laugh. Loudly. Of course Simon would want to talk about that sudden change. Not the other thing. Of course. He could feel his cheeks heating up in embarrassment as he steps away from the man under the guise of grabbing a towel to dry his hands with. "I mean, it was bound to happen, right? My therapist and I talked about it the other day, actually. I already knew that it was going to happen. Just not so soon," He replies, voice surprisingly even.

Simon looks at him as if he doesn't quite understand what's going on. He opens and closes his mouth. Then, relaxes a bit with a relieved look on his face. "So, you don't mind it then?"

"Absolutely not," Soap reassures.

It's not until he's laying in bed about to fall asleep does he realize why that conversation had happened. It causes him to literally abruptly wake up and shoot himself into an upwards position, eyes practically bulging out of his head. She hadn't just been speaking to him and she had made sure to say two separate forms of the word. Just as he suspected.

Leah had called Simon dad too.

Chapter End Notes

Do we all agree that Soap is a Leo? I feel like he is. An August Leo. I may switch it to July just because I have plans for his birthday and I want them to happen soon. Also, Simon is definitely a colder month. December or January.

I believe it is April or May in current timeline. I may have to go back and read to see if I mentioned any months earlier on then do the math. But if not, It's May. So I want Soaps borthday soon. :)) like he DEFINITELY is a Leo right? Or an Aries? That man is some

sort of fire sign. Fire sign recognizes Fire signs. He is one of us.

New Additions

Chapter Summary

We welcome new members to the extended family :) just really a filler chapter to pass the time.

Chapter Notes

A lot of people agreed they saw Soap as a Leo so officially, we're in May. There's going to be this chapter that's the end of May and near the beginning of June. Next one is Soap's birthday!! Which I plan on posting today also. Two chapters today since I really wanna get to the birthday:)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Simon was in the backyard. He had decided to do some yard work today since they haven't really done it in a bit. He wipes the sweat off of his forehead with a slight grimace. May had officially come, signifying him being here for about four months now with Sophie turning five months old.

It feels so much longer than that. It feels as if this has been his life for years now and part of him wonders where all the time goes. They've started transitioning her onto solids with the doctors permission and it had caused genuine heartbreak in Soap as he didn't want her to grow up. Simon chuckles to himself, shaking his head and grabbing the lawnmower again when his phone starts ringing.

The screen read "Price." He takes his hand off the lawn mower, stepping away from the machine to answer the phone call. "Oi, Price. You alright?" He greets.

Not standard but when it comes to the captain, you can never be too sure considering that he has yet to retire. Simon hates him being out there without any of their taskforce being there to have his six when things go wrong. "Bloody hell, Simon. Yes, I'm alright," Price chuckles on the other end, "Do you ever answer the phone like a normal person? Soap's birthday is just coming up so I wanted to see what you guys were doing. Maybe I'd be able to stop by."

Simon doesn't respond right away, blinking to himself in disbelief. That's right. He thinks back fondly to Johnny's last birthday, scrambling over himself while drunk off his ass and begging someone

to give him a piggy back ride. Then, Simon finally obliging only to end up in a bush due to it. "What day is it?" He mumbles, checking the lock screen.

May 24th. Johnny's birthday was August 5th. So he had a little bit of time to figure it out. He brings the phone back up to his ear, saying, "We'll probably have a party of some sort. I'm not for sure yet but I'm guess that the little monsters aren't going to just let cake and some beers suffice."

"Speaking of them, how are they doing?"

"They're doing great. Leah has straight As and Alec is enjoying his time in daycare. Sophie has been attempting to crawl lately so wish us luck in that regard," Simon tells him, catching him up to speed.

Price let's out a loud laugh, "Good luck, son. Something tells me that she'll be the type to get herself into trouble if you look away for one moment."

Simon scoffs at that. He thinks back to the moment she said her first word and the horror that he had felt upon hearing it. Yeah, certainly the troublemaker. "Tell me about it. Her first word was in fact 'fuck.' So, that's that."

That sends Price in to hysterical laughter. Simon couldn't help but smile a bit at the sound, having not heard it in a while. He misses the old man. Once calmed down a bit, he heaves out, "Oh that's great. Thank you, Simon. I needed that laugh."

He responds back with an annoyed hum, even though both of them knew that he was far from it. In the distant tree line, he swore that he could see something move which causes alarm to spread throughout his body. "So, how are you doing, old man?"

"You know. Same old same old. Waiting to retire. Miss my boys. Do you you think that Gaz's baby is purposely choosing not to be born because I'm not there to witness it?"

He squints at the tree line, keeping an eye on it but remaining to act normal. "Maybe. That baby needs to come soon though. She's past her due date and Callie is starting to become homicidal. Don't blame her one bit."

"Cheers to that. Alright well I gotta go. Give Johnny and the kids hugs for me?" Price sighs through the speaker.

"Alright. See you around, Price."

The captain says his goodbyes before hanging up the phone. Simon turns back to the trees again before grabbing a nearby shovel and making his way over to it, a hard look on his face. The brush rustles again. He's getting ready to put his all into protecting his family when he halts his steps at a sound coming from within the bushes. A whining. A dog whining. Simon drops the shovel.

He crouches down, all fury leaving his body as he moves some leaves out of the way to see a puppy with his head stuck in between some branches. It scrambles around. Upon seeing him, it starts to whimper louder and thrash about more. "Shh, shh, you're okay. I got you," He soothes, placing his hand on the fur.

He steadies the dog before grabbing at the branch entrapping it and lifting it just enough so Simon could get it's head out safely. He then scoops the little guy into his arms. The tiny german shepherd stops it's whining, opting to shake its head as he turns on his heel to walk back towards the house.

The right thing to do would be to take it to the vet at least. Get it checked out and look to see if it has a microchip. He makes his way up the stairs and slides the door open before stepping into the kitchen. Johnny comes around the corner and freezes. His eyes widen as he stumbles back, asking, "What the hell is that?"

"A dog?" Simon says, holding the animal up.

"I can see that... But where did you get it?" There's a strange vibe to the man in front of him. He's seemed to considerably paled, eyes darting back and forth between the puppy and the person holding it. His fists are clenched at his sides. On top of all of that, he looks as if he's about ready to bolt at a moment's notice.

"It was stuck in the bushes out back— Johnny, are you afraid of dogs?" He interrogates, a smirk on his as he does so.

Soap's wide eyes fall onto his face as he swallows before shaking his head a little too quickly to be considered believable. But Simon's not going to push. The blond ticks his head to the side for a second as a sign of disconcertment. "Alright. If you say so. I'm going to go give this one a bath," He states.

"In- In our tub?" Soap stutters, following him as he starts to make his way up the stairs. Simon turns, raising an eyebrow at the man

standing at the bottom of them.

He then answers, "Yes?"

"Okay."

"Johnny," Simon sighs, "Look at it. It's a puppy. Doesn't even look old enough to have teeth that could actually cause damage yet. I promise I'd never put you or the kids in any type of harm. It's safe. Besides all we're going to do is bring it to the vet. We don't have to keep the damn thing."

Johnny visibly relaxes at the words. Then stands up straighter and says in a matter-of-factly tone, "By the way, I'm not scared of dogs. Dogs and I just don't get along."

He then turns back to the living room and walks away, leaving Simon standing on the stairs with an amused grin. He's definitely scared of dogs. He makes his way back up the stairs.

—

Of course, the kids adored the dog. They were on their way to the vet after picking the little ones up from school and they were quite literally bouncing off the wall. "Dad! Please," Leah begs, "I'll never ask for anything ever again."

Johnny sighs to himself, eyeing the dog in the backseat. He was wrestling around in Alex's arms, licking the boy's face and admittedly, that had caused the damn thing to win over his heart a bit. Still, it's going to have to be a no.

It's not that Johnny doesn't like dogs. No, he's had some growing up. But he's gotten bit during his time in the service a good amount of times and that was enough to turn him off from that specific type of pet. "Leah," Johnny says, voice trailing on the edge of a warning.

This had been an ongoing thing since they had picked them up. Sophie even participated a bit, reaching out to the animal and squealing at it which had honestly scared the man half to death, expecting the puppy to snap in fear. But it was a rather tame animal. Luckily. He can't help but be cautious. At the end of the day, he needs to protect those kids.

Simon hasn't said a word during the whole debate. Johnny knows that it's because the man secretly agrees that they should keep the dog but

also knows that he's afraid— Not afraid. They just don't get along. The blond looks out the window. But honestly, he's sort of out numbered in this situation. Everyone but him wants the thing.

He sighs to himself. This may be one that he loses.

The vet had confirmed that there was no microchip and the puppy was perfectly healthy. He gave him a round of vaccinations to be on the safe side while Simon and Johnny stared at the pup, who's tail was wagging wildly. "So, if we don't take him. What happens?" Soap ponders, looking at the vet.

She frowns. Simon raises an eyebrow at him, obviously confused by the "if" in that sentence. He can't see his mouth due to the mask but like always, Soap just knows that his lips are pulled up into a hopeful grin. How could he say no to that? Really? "Well," The vet starts, "We would probably keep him for a few days then send him to a nearby shelter where they'll try to get him adopted."

"And if he doesn't get adopted?"

She doesn't respond. Johnny looks down at the puppy panting happily at him and places his hands on his hips. The guilt was eating him alive. If they abandoned this dog and left it to suffer a life of God knows what, he'd never forgive himself. Especially not with those big brown eyes looking into his soul. He closes his eyes, letting out a sigh. "Alright," He mutters, opening his eyes again, "Alright, we'll take him."

Simon perks up next to him, eyes crinkling up in the corners. Johnny was defeated. The dog had managed to win the hearts of the rest of the family so it was a sealed deal at that point. Still, he stared at the creature in apprehension. He turns his head to the blond next to him. "Don't get too excited, ye numpty. We still haven't even given the damn thing a name yet," He says.

Simon only smiles wider, responding, "We'll figure it out."

The vet had given them an extra leash they had along with some medication for worms and a good luck. Once the kids in the waiting room saw that they still had the dog, they had started loudly cheering. Sophie, who was playing with a vet tech, starting mimicking everyone just because.

Once in the car, the name debate had started. "What about Lucky?"

Alec asked. Simon unhooks the mask from his ears before opening the glove box and slipping it inside. Johnny screws up his face at the suggestion.

"That's a little too common, don't you think, mate?" Simon speaks, spinning around to stare at the kids and the dog. Alec seems to think about that for a moment before nodding and agreeing, "Aye. My friend's dog is named that. We want to be different!"

"I think," Leah pipes up, sitting taller, "We should name it after Daddy since he's the one that found it. Simon!"

Johnny laughs loudly at that, "Leah, we can't name the dog Simon. That'll only get confusing."

The change of Simon being called "Daddy" doesn't really alarm Soap anymore and he's quite proud of himself for that. The best part? Dr. Gerber wasn't the one that had made him realize that he was truly okay with it. It was himself. The therapist is currently on vacation and despite his insistence that Johnny could contact him whenever, he refused to. He's not bothering the poor bastard while he's on break.

"How will it get confusing? He's not Simon anymore," Leah interrogates, petting the squirming puppy who's attempting to chew on the seatbelt. Simon reaches his hand back to stop the rascal.

"To you guys," Johnny corrects, "I still call him that."

Leah exhales sadly. This was harder than they all originally thought and Soap is mentally praising his sister and her husband for being able to name three human beings since they're all struggling with giving one to an animal.

Simon purses his lips, thinking. He gets a look on his face that's slightly smug as he says, "Well, luckily my last name can also be used as a first, also. What about Riley?"

There's a sudden silence in the car as both of the kids look at each other in confusion. Johnny glances back at them from the rearview mirror, furrowing his own eyebrows together. Alec speaks up first, "You're not a Mactavish?"

Johnny almost slams on the breaks. In fact, he deserves an award for driving through the shock that that question had caused to course throughout his body. Simon and him glance at each other. There was surprise reflected on both of their faces. "No, bud," He clarifies,

somewhat awkwardly.

"But," Johnny cuts in, "Only by name. We all know that he's a part of our family."

The eldest kids nod. They seem to be quite satisfied with the answer. He looks back over at Simon who was now staring at him with the most emotion that's he's ever seen in the man's eyes before.

Johnny himself was sort of taken off guard by his own words. Somehow, when it had been pointed out that Simon wasn't a Mactavish like the rest of them, he had felt the need to defend his place in this family nonetheless. Because that's what they were. A family. There was no getting around it anymore. Even if this had started out with his lieutenant needing a temporary place to stay, that didn't matter anymore.

He wanted Simon to know that he had a home here. Forever. That there will always be a place for him by Soap's side, no matter what their relationship status was— Right now he believes they fit under the "It's complicated" section. He loves Simon. So much.

And he wants that offer to be out there on the table. But more than anything, he so desperately wants him to take it. If Johnny's being honest, it's starting to get so hard not to just say fuck it and jump in headfirst. But he doesn't want to be reckless with this. This family was the only thing that he wanted to not explode into an unidentifiable wreckage.

Johnny places his hand out on the center console, palm up. He's careful to keep his eyes on the road, trying to remain casual about the request. Simon looks down at it. There's a moment or two where nothing happens and Soap's heart starts to break a bit. But then, a hand slips into his own.

Simon meets him halfway. Just like always.

"I like the name Riley!" Alec says, "I don't know anyone who has a dog named Riley."

Both men laugh at that. So it's agreed. Riley.

—

It's three am when the call comes. The loud shrill of the ringtone pulls Johnny out of his sleep as he rolls over, haphazardly slapping a hand

onto his nightstand in search for the device. Once found, he brings it over to him and cracks one eye open at the bright screen. Gaz. He brings the phone to his ear after pressing accept and closes his eyes again.

"Hello?" He croaks.

"Mate, Soap. Soap. It's time. It's time and I'm freaking out," Gaz panics loudly. Johnny immediately sits up, now fully awake.

He asks, "Its time? The baby's coming?"

"Yes!" Gaz confirms. Soap jumps out of bed, slipping on a pair of sweats over his boxers and practically falling over in the process. He crashes into his door, mumbling an "ouch."

He's quickly walking to Simon's room. "Hold on, Hold on. I gotta get Si up." Gaz doesn't answer back but he could hear Callie on the other side of the line, wanting to know if that was Johnny and Simon. They had both agreed to come and wait for the baby to be born with the couple, knowing that they'll probably need that support during this time.

Johnny opens the door, which causes Simon to immediately get up. There was a knife in his hand and a look of alarm on his features before he realized who was standing in the doorway. The Scot just stares at him with a blank expression. No fear. "Callie is in labor," Soap informs, "We gotta call my parents to watch the kids."

"You grab our stuff. I'll call your parents," Simon instructs, placing the knife back into its original spot before sitting on the bed to take the phone on the nightstand off the charger. Johnny nods, leaving the room.

It took their parents twenty minutes to get there. His mother was practically bouncing off the wall in excitement, telling him how she's excited about another baby in the family. When it had come from her mouth, Johnny had all but almost passed out from shock.

He never knew that his mother had considered Gaz and Callie as family too. Sure, they'd been to all of the family functions as of recent but it doesn't make the new information any less surprising. Though, it's his mother. She adopts everyone and everything. Simon places a kiss on her cheek, mumbling, "Their lunches are packed for tomorrow and Riley's food is in the pantry. Sophie has started on solids but only with snacks. We're trying to transition her onto them with ease so we

don't hurt her stomach. Are you sure you're going to be okay?"

"Of course!" Soap's father reassures, "Go on. Go be with your friends during this life altering moment. They're going to need you two. We got this, boys."

Soap grabs his fathers hands, squeezing them. "Da' I cant thank you guys enough for everything you've done for us," Johnny says, tone thick with nothing other than sincere gratitude.

"We're family, John. That's what we do. No need to thank us. You better get a goin. That baby isn't going to wait for you."

—

Adeline was born at six twenty-eight on May 25th. When Johnny and Simon came into the room, Callie looked over at them with a tired grin on her face with a little bundle of pink in her arms. The two cautiously stepped forwards. Upon seeing the newborn, Johnny could feel his heart swell.

She had more hair than Sophie did at that age, that was for sure. Little dark curls framed her head, just like her parents and she had actually looked so much like Gaz. Soap had ended up patting him on the back, "Poor kid looks like you."

"Shut up, Soap," Gaz tells him, no real heat in his tone. She looked so little. So peaceful. Simon leans over Johnny's shoulder to see her before glancing at Gaz.

"You're going to be a good dad, Garrick. I already know you will. You can relax," Simon tells him. At the sentiment, the new father slackens his muscles and allows his face to relax. One thing about Simon; he doesn't lie. So if he thinks you're going to be a good dad, you're going to to be a good dad.

Soap steps closer to Callie, whispering, "You did a good job. She's beautiful."

"Thank you," She says back, voice a bit rougher and quieter than it usually is. Johnny places a hand on her shoulder for a moment.

"The parents say hello," Simon informs the couple, "You should've seen Johnny's mom. She was over the moon. Said she couldn't wait to meet her."

“Really?” Callie coos, face falling into an awed pout at the information. Both of the men nod. She looks over at Gaz, grabbing his hand and keeping the expression on her face. They stay for a little longer before deciding that they were going to let the new family get their rest and go back to their own.

Chapter End Notes

All I have to say is: Soaps birthday ♦♦♦♦♦

Happy Birthday, Johnny

Chapter Summary

Johnny's birthday

Aka, get your head out of your ass boys.

Chapter Notes

Hehehe

Check out the new tags on this baby *slaps fic like a car salesman*

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"Would it make any difference if he knew that you had misunderstood the conversation?" Dr. Gerber asks.

"No," Johnny responds, "I don't think so. At the end of the day I have no problem with them calling him dad too. I don't think he does either."

A genuine smile appears on his therapist's face. The session seemed to go by incredibly slow today, probably due to the fact that he knew that Simon and the kids weren't at the park today. They were shopping for his birthday.

He was trying to not make it a big deal this year, considering all that had happened but then Price had to open his big mouth and ask Simon what they're planning on doing. Apparently pizza and a movie wasn't good enough for the kids. "So, they call you guys dad. Now what?" Dr. Gerber interrogates, "What's the plan now?"

Johnny runs his hands down his face, letting out a huff for frustration as he does so. He makes eye contact with the man, a grimace on his face. "Try to survive my birthday."

On the next day, he had been woken up by two little monsters jumping on him and breakfast in bed. Simon had shot him a look of apology. "Wake up! It's your birthday!" Alec yelled out.

Johnny sat up as both children sat next to him and the platter of food was handed to him. The first thing that he had decided to go for was the coffee that was made just exactly as he liked, causing him to shoot a look of awe at the blond standing by the foot of the bed. He took a sip. Then asked, "Sophie?"

"Asleep still," Simon informed him, "I tried to let you sleep in as much as possible but these guys wanted to wake you up as soon as possible."

Leah and Alec stick out their tongues at him as he rolls his eyes in a playful manner, holding out a hand to ruffle the little boy's hair. Once Soap is digging in to the food, the children run off as if the room was on fire causing him to sit up even more and look around wildly

Simon laughs, pushing his chest lightly. "At ease, soldier. Think they're just getting their presents for you," He jokes. There's a bright twinkle in those brown orbs, causing Johnny's heart to warm.

"Can I tell you a secret?" He leans forwards, whispering. The other man nods. He swallows part of the delicious pancake before grabbing the mug and taking a large gulp of coffee just to mess with his ... friend.(?) He gets a bored stare back.

Once he's settled with the fact that he had managed to successfully annoy him after only being awake for ten minutes at most, he mumbles, "I kind of didn't want to celebrate my birthday this year."

Simon puts on the worst mock shocked face that Johnny has ever seen in his life. Hardly convincing. Then, with sarcasm dripping from his gruff voice, he says, "You don't say? Could've fooled me with how you avoided talking about it at all costs and insisted on us not doing anything for it. As if that was going to work."

The Scot laughs at him, shaking his head. Just then, the kids come rushing back in with wide grins on their faces and Johnny would do anything to see that expression on them so he decides to act like the hesitation for the day doesn't exist.

They wait for him to be done with his breakfast. Hardly.

The whole time they were impatiently vibrating from where they sat on the mattress, staring at him and then the plate of food. After he was finished, he set the platter onto the nightstand while telling them, "Alright, before you two launch off into space let's see what we have here."

Alec shoves his in his direction first, making Soap jump back slightly at the movement before blinking harshly and laughing. "Slow down, lad," He jokes, "I'll open it."

The boy giggles. Johnny ruffles his hair and brings the present onto his lap, grabbing the envelope that contained the card first. Upon pulling it out, he swears he almost cries. It's a hand drawn one with the words, "Happy Birthday!" sloppily written on the front along with stick figures of him, Alec, Simon, Leah, and Sophie. There's also two in the clouds. That makes Johnny's heart ache slightly but he pushes forwards anyways.

Inside, it's obviously Simon's handwriting.

You are so cool. I want to be just like you when I grow up. Happy birthday!! I hope your day rocks!

*Love,
Alec.*

He looks at the little boy, eyes genuinely filling up with tears at the card. If you asked Johnny why. He'd say he doesn't know. But really, it all meant so much to him already and it proved to him that these kids cared deeply for him. That was a good enough present. He hugs Alec to the best of his ability with the wrapped item on his lap.

The four year old only reciprocates for a moment before he's shoving the present towards him more and Johnny catches the hint. He tears open the wrapping paper. It's a shoebox. He raises his eyebrows up at Alec, opening it carefully. Inside, there's a new pair of work boots that obviously costs a pretty penny. "Alec..." he trails off.

"You had said that once summer comes around, you want to try to build a deck for out back," Simon explains for him, "You never did. So, he wanted to give you new boots since when we renovated the house, you had an old pair of sneakers on. He said that could motivate you to do it."

The thoughtfulness of the gift fills his heart. It's true. All the backyard was right now was a sliding glass door that leads to stairs to a patch of grass. After the house had started to look more as something he could envision them spending forever in, he had told everyone that he wanted to build a deck so that when they had birthday parties or hangouts where everyone could sit outside. Dreaming big.

Soap had always been handy. Even as a teen. His father had taught his kids everything he knows about cars and building things. Both Anna and him liked to bond over it. Clara hadn't been interested. She was more laid back than them. Just liked to be at peace. There were times when they were growing up where their parents had randomly decided to remodel something so the eldest Mactavish siblings would jump in to help.

So this? This means a lot. "Thank you, Alec. This is very thoughtful."

He bounces up and down, asking, "You like it?"

"I love it. I promise, I'll get that deck built soon since you seem to really want it. Maybe I'll even show you how to do it."

Johnny places a kiss on the top of his messy brown hair as Simon comes forward to take the box from him. Leah scooches towards him. She's abnormally shy as she hands him the smaller shaped gift and an envelope so he says to her, "I adore it already, m'eudail."

She beams at him. He rips open the envelope, taking out the card. There was obviously a lot of time put into it as the wording is far neater than hers or Simon's. He holds it up, "Who wrote this?"

"Aunt Callie," She answers simply, "Didn't want Simon to ruin the surprise."

Simon looks over at her in fake offense. Meanwhile Soap just tells her how good of an idea that had been with a wink. The front just says happy birthday. But when he opens it up, he's met with a long paragraph.

To my new Dad,

Happy birthday. Thank you for everything that you and Daddy do for us. I know that you miss mommy and daddy just like we do but they are proud of you just like you are of us. You make me feel special. So now, it's your turn to feel special too. Having you with us has been the greatest gift that you could've given us so I wanted to give you something that you'd enjoy. I'm happy with you guys being my new parents. Happy birthday again. I love you.

*Love,
Leah*

Ps. Happy birthday and get your head out of your ass. They call you Dad

and Daddy now.

-Callie

By the end of the card, he was most definitely sobbing. He wipes at his eyes aggressively, mumbling, "I'm going to kick Callie's ass."

Of course he wasn't going to actually kick her ass but he was going to get her back for not giving him some sort of heads up about that. Alec's had caused him to tear up and then that one felt like a sucker punch. "Thank you, Leah," He sniffles. She smiles at him.

He then pulls open the wrapping paper. Inside is a leather book. He looks inside to find tons of blank pages. "It's a new sketchbook. Fancy. Daddy said that you had one back when you were in the military and that you used to write or draw in it all of the time. Your experiences there, what you've seen. I thought maybe you could start to do that again! I'd love to see your work but Daddy says that the one you have is not for kids."

He looks over the pages, trying to decide how exactly he'd fill this many. Still, excited at all of the possibilities nonetheless as it has been a while since he had even thought about his journal or drawing. It was thicker than his old one but around the same size as the other had been. He smiles at the girl, saying, "I love it. Thank you so much. Both of you."

He brings them both into tight hugs. Simon stands off to the side, watching them with a huge grin on his face. After the kids get bored of the embrace and pull away, calling out about getting ready as they leave, he looks up at his former lieutenant.

At this moment, he's sure that his face is revealing everything that he feels for the man but for once, it doesn't scare him. He had gone through all of this in attempt to make his day good, despite figuring that he hated the idea of his birthday this year. Johnny kicks the covers off. Then, stands, grabbing Simon's face between his hands. "Thank you," He states.

Then, he's wrapping his arms around the blond and burying his face into the taller man's neck. A chuckle comes from the body presses against his. Two arms embrace him as Simon mutters into his hair, "Don't thank me yet. Your birthday isn't done and I haven't given you my present."

Johnny backs up, abruptly. He stares at the man in bewilderment as

the former lieutenant just gets that stupidly attractive smug look on his face. He doesn't reveal anything else, instead just instructs, "Go get yourself ready. Party starts in a hour."

Then he leaves the room. The Scot stands there, turning around in circles for a moment as the words lull over him. Simon had got him something? The realization makes his heart thrum wildly against his chest. He shakes away the feeling, starting to get ready.

He comes down the stairs, adjusting his white button up as he does so with a slight nervousness pricking at his stomach. Sure, at one point in his life, Johnny used to love being the center of attention but for some reason it doesn't seem as exciting anymore. He feels as if he had aged decades over the course of the past few months but he's only one year older now.

He runs his hand through his now freshly cut hair. It was time. He had started to let the sides get way too long and the top too unruly. Since they're no longer in the military though, the both were allowed to keep their hair on the longer side. Which, let him tell you. He appreciated.

Simon was growing out his hair and if he thought that the man was attractive before? This was a whole other level that sometimes had Soap wanting get down on his knees and beg him for just one chance. Luckily, Johnny had some dignity left. Only some.

So, he had kept his top part long, shaving the sides and creating more of a mullet effect rather than a mohawk. Then he trimmed down his stubble, cutting the sides a bit to clean it up and make it look less wild. He had been quite happy with it.

He makes his way into the kitchen where Simon and the kids were turned with their backs to him. Sophie being the only one to see him since she was in her walker nearby. As soon as he was in her sights, she screamed out, "Da! Da da da!"

He laughed at the now almost seven month old, shaking his head. Then he says, "How do I look?"

Johnny makes a show of holding out his arms as they all face him. The smile on Simon's face drops. He watches those brown eyes rake over him and those pale hands squeeze the recipe book in until the knuckles were as white as paper. He quirks up an eyebrow.

“You look good!” Leah tells him bouncing up and down while clapping her hands. Alec nods along with sister.

He urges, “Simon?”

“Yeah, Johnny,” He swallows, “You look damn good.”

The compliment causes his cheeks to flush and a small grin to appear on his face. He hides it by spinning, doing a full 360 to show off the outfit of choice which consisted of white button up, a belt, and his good jeans. Simon whistles.

Soap then dramatically pulls at his rolled up sleeves before popping his collar. All three of the children giggle at his silliness, causing both of the adults to smile along with them. He calms them all down, making his way over to the kitchen.

He places a hand on Alec’s back. Both of the kids are arguing about what Johnny’s favorite dish is and before he could even cut in to tell them what it was, Simon leans in to whisper in his ear, “You really do look good, Johnny.”

A shiver makes its way up his spine.

Simon and the kids aren’t letting him do anything to help, somehow managing to recruit Gaz into being on “Dad watch.” He’s not allowed in the kitchen. He’s not allowed to help set up the tables. So now, he’s sitting in the living room watching some football match and holding a standing Sophie.

Her eyes are also glued onto the screen. Both of them are on the floor, Soap cross legged while Sophie has her hands resting on the coffee table. Usually she’d slap the surface with loud babbles. But they were both too engrossed in watching the game.

“She’s just like you,” A familiar voice laughs. He turns his head to see his dad standing in the archway, a fond look on his face.

“In some ways,” Soap agrees, laughing.

“No,” His dad corrects, coming to sit on the couch by him, “In all ways. When you were a baby, you were always smiling and babbling. Slapping anything you could with loud screeches and giggles. Just like her. Hardly ever cried or made a fuss of anything. Overall a good kid.

Which is why I feel like I should warn you about the toddler years. You gave me and your mother a run for our money. Oh my God.”

Johnny laughs at that, looking over at the baby who was still focused on the screen with her mouth gaped open. It was closer than he'd like to admit. The toddler years were just right around the corner as they were getting closer to her first birthday. “Was my first word ‘fuck’ though?” Soap asks, self deprecatingly.

His father answers, “No.”

Soap sighs. It was funny looking back on as she hasn't said it since that day when it had become a strict rule of that word being forbidden in the household until she's older. But still. Sometimes it's a little on the more embarrassing side to think about.

Suddenly, his dad says, “It was ‘shit.’”

Johnny whips his head around to stare at the man who raised him. His mouth was pressed in a firm line. The younger one narrows his eyes at him for a moment, trying to look for any of the tells that he grew accustomed to. None. Despite not seeing any, he pulls his lips into a disbelieving smile. “Yer bum's oot the windae,” He laughs.

“No! I used to have a habit of dropping things and saying ‘shit’ afterwards. So one day, you dropped your pacifier...”

Johnny lets out a loud cackle, taking one hand off of Sophie to splay it on his chest while his father just lightly chuckled along. Gaz looks over, “You don't even know how much sense that makes...”

He turns to glare at Gaz, secretly sticking up a middle finger behind Sophie's back so that she doesn't see it and copy. His best friend just lets out a laugh. There's a knock on the door and Soap watches Simon come from the kitchen to open the door. Price walks in with a loud, “Guess who's here?”

“Grandpa Price! Grandpa Price!” The children yell out, running in from where Simon just came in from. Price crouches down to hold out his arms and lets the children hug him. Sophie lets out a loud babble along with a screech before plopping herself down onto her butt.

Then she gets on all fours.

Simon turns his head, eyes widening as he tugs at Price's sleeve causing the older man to look up at him then track his vision. His

arms slip away from the eldest two who were also watching the scene in stunned silence. Sophie rocks back and forth, bubbly nonsense coming from her mouth. The whole room holds their breath.

Price motions forwards, “Come on, Sophie. Come say hi.”

She yells out in glee, attempting to put a clumsy hand out and making grabbing gestures. Then she places it out in front of the other. Johnny covers his mouth to stop the gasp from coming out in an attempt not to break her concentration. Then the whole room watches as she clumsily crawls her way over to Price, who has tears welling up in his eyes.

Once she’s to the man, he scoops her up in his arms and the entire starts to praise the baby as she grabs at Price’s hat. Johnny makes his way over to the two, grabbing Sophie’s hands and pulling them up and down. He says in a high pitched voice to her, “Good job! I’m so proud of you.”

Simon comes up behind him, placing one hand on his back and the other on her arm gently. Upon seeing the two men, she twist her body and makes grabby hands at them now. “Da da da,” She babbles.

Johnny takes her from Price’s arms and places kisses all over her face as she giggles. Once he’s done, Simon leans in to place one on her face too, with a, “Look at you, stealing your dad’s thunder.”

“Haha,” Soap responds sarcastic to Simon, “I’m not even mad so the jokes on you.”

“Was that the first time that she’s ever done that?” Price asks. Both men turn towards their old captain, faces blank until they realized that he didn’t around that often to know these things.

Simon smiles, placing a hand on his shoulder. “No,” He informs, “That was the first time.”

At that moment, Callie, Adeline, and Soap’s mom come in with various things like balloons and presents. They look around at the room. Price spins to move out of their way. Callie then looks around the room, whispering to his mother, “We definitely missed something.”

—

“Gentle, Sophie. Gentle,” Johnny informs her. She was looking at

Adeline with wide eyes, trying to reach out to the two month old as she strained against her dad's grip. Gaz looks up from his baby over to his girlfriend, looking lovesick.

"I think I understand you, now," He says.

Johnny turns his attention onto him, knitting his eyebrows together. Then asks, "What?" Sophie babbles at the baby before clapping her hands together clumsily and leaning back. Obviously excited.

Gaz flicks his gaze over to him, "I don't want to mess this up. I'm so scared of saying the wrong thing or moving too fast. The last thing I want to do is scare her off and lose what I have now. That's how you feel about him."

Johnny cranes his neck to look over at Simon as Gaz juts out his chin towards him. The blond was helping the kids set the tables and giving Alec a high five after it was all done. The Scot smiles. "Aye," He confirms, "But I don't want to be afraid of that anymore. For all I know, it's only holding us back."

He turns back to Gaz, making sure they make eye contact with each other. "Callie loves you, ye dafty. Whatever it is that you want to do, do it. We're not getting any younger, that's for damn sure," He says, grabbing his beer off the coffee table and takes a sip. Gaz gives him a grateful look.

"You should follow your own advice, Mactavish," He tells him, gently. Then looks down at Adeline, who grips at his finger. Johnny looks over at Simon, who happened to glance over at him at that moment. He holds their eye contact and takes another swig at the only beer that he was having that night. Now thinking of maybe doing just that.

—

"Simon almost had a fuckin' breakdown!" Johnny laughs, moving his hands sporadically as he spoke. Then covers his mouth, looking over at the blond who was giving him a slightly annoyed look at the slip up. The Scot mouths a quick apology.

It's ironic because they were actually just telling the story of Sophie's first word. Which, is what caused the rule to be created in the first place. Simon lets out a dramatic sigh, shoving him lightly. It was way past dinner and night had begun to fall so they had all moved outside to talk, wanting to enjoy the nighttime summer breeze. The kids ran around the yard, tagging each other or whatever game that they were

playing. Callie sat, Sophie stood in front of her while Gaz held a very wide eyed Adeline as the infant looked around at the lights above her.

“So, you mentioned thinking about building a deck here?” Price infers, changing the conversation as he tilts his head in interest.

“Aye!” Soap confirms, “I want it big enough for us to put a whole seating area out here and maybe, eventually if we’re lucky, a hot tub?”

He looks at Simon who scoffs loudly at that, a lopsided smirk on his face as he shook his head. His hands were shoved in his pockets. His facial features were the most relaxed that he had ever seen them and the orange light from the setting sun had made him look nothing less than beautiful. Johnny swooned.

“This one,” Simon says, taking a hand out of his pocket to gesture a thumb at Soap, “Always dreaming big.”

“Dream big. Work hard. Play hard. Right Da?” Johnny urges while slapping a hand on his father’s back. The older Mactavish raises up his hands in surrender, not wanting to get involved in the conversation at all.

They all stay out there until night falls. Laughing and talking the daylight away, causing a deep happiness to build up in Johnny at the life that has been built around them. Sure, the military was great and sometimes he missed it. But, this? Time with his family as his kids ran around the yard with Price chasing them? He wouldn’t trade it for the world.

Suddenly, everyone started moving. Price was taking Sophie from Callie and Gaz was handing her Adeline before making his way over to where the two hosts stood. Johnny sends a questioning glance at Simon. The blond leans in, mumbling, “It’s time for your present.”

He then moves behind Soap, placing his hands over his eyes. “Simon,” Johnny warns lightheartedly. A quick shush is sent his way by the taller man. Then, they’re walking. He can register three sets of footsteps and based on how they walk he can guess exactly who it is. Him, Simon, and Gaz. Military training pays off.

Johnny almost trips over himself before correcting. Never mind the military training then. “Bloody hell, Johnny,” Simon growls. Gaz only chuckles.

Soap defends, "I can't see!"

It's quiet between all of them again and he feels like they've been walking forever, although realistically he's counted in his brain only about 50 steps. "Why do fathers take an extra pair of socks when they go golfing?" The former lieutenant suddenly asks.

"No," Gaz groans, "I thought I was free."

Soap beams at the familiarity, it creating a warmth to spread throughout his whole body. It's been a while since he's heard any of these corny dad jokes and he hasn't realized how badly he's missed them until now. "I don't know. Why?" Johnny plays along.

"In case they get a hole in one."

A scoff escapes his mouth while their friend's footsteps get decently heavier, as if he was slouching over which he probably was in all honesty. "How does the moon cut it's hair?" Simon asks, setting up another one.

Johnny thinks really hard on this one. He wants to get one right, desperately. However, he's afraid that he strains a muscle with how much he tries to figure it out, causing Simon to hum in amusement. "How?" He gives in.

"Eclipse it."

Gaz let's out a loud groan, "That was so bad."

But Johnny's as happy as could be. His eyes are suddenly uncovered and they're standing by a lake. He turns around, seeing that they had walked through the forest behind the house to get here.

Then, a hand grabs at his chin, slowly and gently turning his head so that he can direct his vision to the present. Fireworks. "It was the closest thing I could get to an explosive device," Simon explains, "Figured you'd like that."

Soon, the most mischievous smile he's ever had makes it's way onto his face as he faces his attention onto Simon. "You thought right," He rumbles, excitement leaking off of his voice.

The former lieutenant's gaze takes across his face and Soap again has the urge to just lean forward in a desperate attempt to press their lips together. But then Simon grins, nodding. "Good man. Garrick is here

to supervise you and make sure you don't blow yourself up. Which he will be taking his role *very seriously*."

There's a warning in his tone. Soap ignores it but Gaz straightens up, eyes wide as he clumsily salutes at the man as if they were back on base. Then Simon walks off. Johnny elbows Gaz, "Still letting him freak you out, aye?"

"No, you don't understand because he always had a soft spot for you. That wasn't Simon talking. That was Ghost. And Ghost is scary... Even without the mask," The former sergeant argues.

"Sure he is."

"Soap, seriously. You've never been on the other end of his wrath."

"I'd like to be."

"Oh, come on man," Gaz whines as Soap starts to set everything up. The banter feels so healing. It reminds him of their countless talks in the mess hall or at training. He bends over to set up the fireworks.

—

Simon makes his way back to the party, seeing everyone waiting for him as he smiles awkwardly at the group. He makes his way over to Soap's mom. "You got the ear plugs?"

She nods, taking them out of her pocket before handing them off to the man as he makes his way over to Price. He's stopped halfway through. Callie stands from her chair, asking, "Are they going to be careful?"

"God, I hope so," Simon responds, "Scared the hell out of your boyfriend so he should listen. Johnny, I'm not so sure. Never listens to me."

Callie lets out a huff of relief, placing a free hand on his arm in thanks. "He'll be fine. You said this is basically what his whole career used to be based around, right?" She comforts.

He only is able to nod back. In all honesty, he's a bit worried. Not because he thinks Johnny will be stupid but because he knows how carried away the man can get when it comes to things that go boom. But, it was worth it. With how excited he had seemed. Soap's mother than comes up and says, "Oh quit your worryin'. John used to set off

fireworks for us all of the time and he is actually pretty good at it. Always created the best shows for us as wee lad. You'll enjoy it."

She walks away, sitting down on a chair next to her husband. They both blink. Simon holds up the ear plugs and gestures towards Sophie while Callie nods, "Yeah, I should probably bring this one inside."

She motions down to a sleeping Adeline. They part ways. Once within distance of Sophie, he puts on a big smile and greets in a high pitched, "Hey, princess." The little girl whips herself around and starts giggling as soon as she sees him.

"Da," She calls out happily, "Da"

Price seems to reboot at that. Simon, not even really noticing the baffled expression on his former captain's face, takes her as she reaches out for him while continuing to repeat what she was saying earlier. It stops once she's propped on his hip. She flaps her arms excitedly, letting out a happy scream. Then, Price stammers out, "She- She calls you dad too?"

"Mhm," He answers honestly, "All of the kids do. Can you open these for me? I didn't think this through."

Price shakes the shock away, taking the packaged ear plugs that Simon is now holding out far enough away out of Sophie's reach. He rips open the packet. Once the objects are in his palm, he keeps it opened so that the blond can grab them. "And you're... okay with that?"

"Yes, Price. I'm okay with it."

"But you and Soap aren't together?"

Simon purses his lips at that, unsure of how to answer that question now. A month or two ago he would've just said that they aren't, plain and simple. But lines are starting to blur between them now. They hold hands, they give each other forehead kisses, and they both talk about future plans.

Together.

Not separately in any means. There's no more talk of when Simon leaves or how they'll keep in touch when they move on with their lives. Instead, they talk about events in the far future as if they'll still be living under the same roof.

"It's," He starts, "Complicated between Johnny and I right now. I do fully believe that we will eventually end up together at this point in time. I mean, come on. The kids call us both Dad. But, there's just a lot we've both been working through the past few months. Both of with accepting a life outside of military, his sister being gone, and me trying to be okay with having a family again. It just feels as if it's never been the right time. Which, you know I'm okay with. I'd rather us do it right then us just act on our feelings before either of us are fully ready..."

"So, you're still struggling with that?" Price asks, frowning in sympathy. Simon shrugs one shoulder before taking an ear plug and putting into Sophie's ear. She bats at his hand at first, making an face that shows it's uncomfortable since she's not sure what it is but calms down as he soothes her with hushes and light kisses on her head.

"Well, yeah, Price. Times like right now, I'm fine. But everything I know about taking care of kids or being part of something like this is from them. So sometimes, I'll look at Alec and instead of him, I'll see Joseph. It's hard but I'm choosing to stay anyways. I'm done running."

Price beams at him. He waits until Simon grabs the other ear plug and settles it into her ear. She seems just as upset by it before but he calms her down the same way, knowing that it was necessary to protect her hearing at this age. Well, at any age. But specifically, around now. But finally, he lands a hand on his arm, squeezing. "You've become quite the man, Simon," He praises, "I'm proud of you."

Simon can't help but feel slightly awkward in the event of someone outwardly complimenting him. But the other feeling is something that he wants to revel in. It's pride in himself. The two emotions swirl around in his stomach as if they were at war, leaving him only to move his head up and down once.

Then he says, "I need to text them that we're all good here before she rips these things out of their ears."

Price smiles at him again, going to sit down on the steps that lead up to the house. Simon readjusts Sophie, calling out for the kids to come sit with him and the captain as he follows. Once they're all sat with Callie watching through the sliding glass door, he sends a quick text over to Gaz.

The youngest of the three kids keeps making noises of discontent before trying to rip the plugs out of her ears while Simon gently pulls

her hands away. When the first firework goes off, she freezes and watches it go up. When it explodes, Leah lets out a, “Woah.”

Alec grins at it. He checks on Sophie again, seeing a look of amazement on her little features. He smiles, watching the fireworks. If he really tries, he swears he can hear Johnny’s “Ka-Freaking-Boom, baby.”

—

Once the show was over, him, Gaz, and Johnny clean up the mess. Then, make their way over to the house as everyone says their goodbyes, including the 141 members. Leah yawns loudly once the house is empty, Alec is practically asleep on his feet, and Sophie is asleep in Johnny’s arms. “Did you have a good birthday, dad?” Alec slurs tiredly.

“The best,” Johnny assured him, leaning down, “All thanks to you guys.”

They get the kids to bed and make their way downstairs to clean up the mess from the party since they had told Soap’s parents that it was way too late for them to stay to clean. For once, the younger two won. The music plays still.

It’s much quieter than it was earlier. The only light coming into the kitchen was the ones from outside and over the sink as Simon scrubs at the dishes. Johnny watches him. He’s still wearing the black t-shirt that hugs his body quite nicely and part of him is appreciating him in it while other... Not so much.

He stew on the thought, picking up the trash left behind in the dining room. Simon had gone through all of this. All for him.

Johnny has never had someone like this before in his life. Someone who seems so obviously devoted to bringing him happiness in whatever way that someone can. Someone who’s so patient. Who sees him for all of his flaws and doesn’t at all judge him, instead standing behind him as he works to do better. He turns to face Simon, leaning against the dining table.

He doesn’t want to lose it.

Johnny walks over, slowly and cautiously but filled with a new determination. He places his hand on the blond’s back, feeling the muscles move underneath of it. “Simon,” He whispers.

There's a shiver felt under his palm. As soon as those brown eyes are on him though, he loses his nerve. Desperately, he tries to gain it back. Searching for something to assist him when the speaker decides to do it for him. The beginning of "I Can't Help Falling In Love" by Elvis plays. The classic slow dancing song.

He reaches to turn the water off and then grabs Simon's hand. "Dance with me," He murmurs quietly into the space between them. He slips the limb that was resting on the blond's back onto the spot between his shoulder and neck, squeezing the other one held the taller man's hand in his own.

"You know I can't dance, Johnny."

"I don't care," He begs, "It's my birthday. You have to spoil me."

Simon rolls his eyes, turning in his grip so that they were facing each other. When he feels the touch on his hip, he practically almost melts into a puddle on the floor. "I always spoil you," The blond responds.

"Aye. That you do."

As they dance to the song, Simon humming along to it, Johnny moves himself closer until they're basically pressed completely up to each other. He lets go of the taller man's hand and wraps his arms around his neck. Then, Simon snakes his own around Soap's waist. The actions pull them impossibly closer to one another.

The smell of Simon fills his senses, much like that one time after his therapy session and he feels nothing but at ease. The rest of the world melts away. He forgets that it's his birthday or everything that had occurred to lead them to this moment. Instead, it's just them.

The song ends and they pull away enough only to look at each other as the other song starts to play. Simon is staring at him with a half lidded gaze, as if he was just as entranced by the moment as Johnny was. He feels a hand slip up his back while the other grabs at his waist. His own unclasp from each other and land themselves on either side of the man's neck with his thumbs pressed against his cheeks.

They breathe into each other's spaces, both hesitant as they search their eyes. Both looking for any doubt. Both finding none. Just as they lean in, Leah yells out from the top of the stairs, "Dad! Daddy! Can one of you bring me up some water?"

The both let out a tiny groan, not even noticeable to anyone but them.

Simon leans forwards, resting his forehead against Johnny's as he whispers, "I got it."

They take a moment and then Simon pulls away, grabbing a sippy cup out of the cupboard and filling it with water from the fridge. Soap leans back on the counter. "I'll be right back," The man says before making his way up the stairs.

While he's gone, Soap stares accusingly at the tiled floor while thrumming his fingers against the counter top. His lip hurts from how bad he's biting it. They were definitely having a moment there and no one in the world could deny that. The speaker shuts off as the music dies, leaving him in the quiet with his thoughts rushing around in his head.

It's a while before Simon comes back down. Yet, Soap is right where he was when he had first left. Fingers drumming against the counter, leaning back. Johnny knows that he's staring at the former lieutenant in a way that can only be described as pure want. But the blond isn't looking at him.

As soon as his mouth opens, Johnny launches himself off the counter and moves towards him. "Sorry it took so long. She's passed out no—"

He grabs Simon's face and presses their lips together before he even gets a chance to finish. At first, there's no reciprocation due to the initial shock of the sudden contact. But eventually he melts into it. The kiss is passionate but incredibly gentle in a way that could probably bring tears to one's eyes. It was a long time coming.

They both acted like they needed it like oxygen.

Once they pull away, they stay close enough to where their lips brush as they breathe into each other's spaces again. Johnny doesn't even open his eyes as he manages out, "I love you. I'm sorry that it took so long. But I'm all yours if you'll have me."

Simon doesn't respond verbally. Just presses their lips together again before grabbing at his hips and pulling them flush against his. The kiss started out passionate but quickly turns sloppy. Rushed. Definitely hungry.

"I love you more," Simon gets out between kisses, "Than you could even imagine."

Then, the other man bends down without pulling away and wraps his

arms around Johnny's thighs heaving them up until they're around his waist. Next thing they both know, Soap is sitting on the counter causing kitchen items to clang together loudly. Simon lets out a growl of frustration, kissing the corner of his lips all the way down until he reaches his neck. Soap flutters his eyes closed at the sensation. Their breaths are both coming out rushed, chests heaving against one another as crazed hands roam each other, not entirely sure where to land. Johnny grabs at the blond hair, pulling it.

"Si," He pants, "Si. Not here. Bedroom."

Simon detaches himself, eyes blown wide as he asks, "Are you sure?"

Johnny nods, swallowing away the dryness in his throat, "Are you?"

"Never been more sure in my life."

They tumble their way up to Johnny's bedroom, careful not to wake up the kids as they do so. Once inside, he presses Simon up against the door and starts kissing him with just as much fervor as before. A pale hand scrambles to lock the door.

Johnnys satisfied at the sound. He pulls away, running a hands along the side of Simon's face with a murmur of, "Stay."

The man gulps causing Johnny to trace the movement with his gaze. "What?" He whispers in response to the Scot.

"Stay," Soap repeats, locking eyes with him, "Don't look for anywhere else to live. Stay with us."

Simon smirks, leaning forwards to press a chaste and gentle kiss on his lips. When he pulls back, he mumbles back, "That is the easiest request to fulfill that you have ever thrown my way, Johnny."

"Good," Johnny purrs, "Because I'm about to give you a hundred reasons why you should"

He pulls the blond in for another kiss by the collar of his shirt, flipping them around so that Simon is walking backwards to the bed.

Chapter End Notes

That was my first and last time writing spice. I have never written spice before in my life but you know what? You guys deserve a bit.

I don't like writing full smut. I'm comfortable only writing the lead up to it so there will be no explicit smut scenes. Anyways I hope you enjoyed the food.

Also I don't reread my long chapters so sorry for any typos or mistakes 🐶

Morning After

Chapter Summary

A surprise pov of the night of Johnny's birthday.

Awkward encounters.

Dad Simon. And more love confessions. Yes, of course they are in what people describe as a honeymoon phase. Except of course neither want it to end.

Chapter Notes

I hope you enjoy it. Btw this fic isn't over yet. There's still some plots I have in my mind. Stay tuned if you want!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Leah had woken up from her sleep, throat scratchy from how dry it felt. She sat up, rubbing at her sleepy heavy eyes and looks around the room to find no water cup in sight. She frowns.

She yawns, getting up from her bed and getting ready to bound down the stairs and grab a little cup of water like she'll usually do if her dads are asleep. Which at this point she assumes that they are. But then, as she get closer to the staircase she hears a faint voice say, "Dance with me."

Dad.

"You know I can't dance, Johnny," The another responds, deeper. Daddy. She furrows her eyebrows together in confusion, sneaking down just enough so that she could peak under the spot where the upstairs floor becomes downstairs ceiling.

"I don't care," Dad does that pout that always makes Daddy give in, "It's my birthday. You have to spoil me."

Leah can't see Daddy's face since his back is to her, but based off of that blinding smile that Dad only ever sends towards the taller one of the two, he won. Daddy turns in his grip so that they were facing each other, placing a hand on Dad's hip. The shorter one gets that soft look in his eye. The one again, only reserved for Daddy.

"I always spoil you," The blond responds, voice gentle.

"Aye. That you do."

As they dance to the song, Leah can slightly hear Daddy humming along to it with Dad moving himself closer until they're basically pressed completely up to each other. He lets go of the taller ones's hand and wraps his arms around his neck. Then, Daddy hugs him close.

She tilts her head. When her other parents were still here she had witnessed plenty of moments of love between them. Kisses. Hugs. Cuddling. She's quite confused because isn't this the same thing? And if it was, then why isn't Daddy one of them? Why does Dad insist on them not being together?

Suddenly it dawns on her. This wasn't like the things that they usually do. This was all new. She's never seen them this close to each other or heard them speak so quietly. She wonders what it means. She watches Dad bury his face into the crook of Daddy's neck and since his eyes are closed, Leah steps down a bit more to get a better look before creeping back into the shadows so that they don't notice her. It was a tactic she's seen Daddy use multiple times when trying to prank Dad. It always worked.

The music stops. She widens her eyes, leaning closer as if watching a movie. They pull away from each other just enough to where they stare in each other's eyes and now Leah feels like she should probably say something. Still, she watches Dad bring hands up to Daddy's neck. Then, her socked foot slips against the wood floor from where she sat, causing a thump. She scrambles up the stairs in fear that they heard her snooping, calling out, "Dad! Daddy! Can one of you bring me up some water?"

It was a cover but it was also what she had originally tried to come downstairs for.

For a second, there's not anymore sound. She's almost convinced they didn't hear her as she sits at the top of the stairs. She darts her eyes around, leaning forwards slightly to focus her hearing on the two men in the kitchen. That's when she hears Daddy whisper in a tone so unbelievably gentle, "I got it."

She's never heard that tone before. It's so... She doesn't even really know how to explain it. There's the sound of a cupboard closing. There's footstep. Someone's grabbing a sippy cup out of it and filling it

with water from the fridge from what she can tell by the sound of water flowing. "I'll be right back," The same voice says before she sees Daddy peak around the bottom of the stairs.

When he sees her, he smiles. Then comes up, handing out a water cup to her once he's close enough to her. His brown eyes look so relaxed at this moment. "What're you doing just sitting up here?" He asks her, hushed.

She shrugs. Then, holds out her hand which he gladly takes, leading her back to her room as she rubs tiredly at her eyes. He doesn't turn on the light. Instead, he scoops her up into his arms and brings over to the bed, setting her down with a dramatic grunt. She giggles. He lets her take a couple of sips of her water before she lays down and he brings the covers up to her chin. "Good night, monster," Daddy mumbles lightheartedly, pressing a kiss against her forehead. She makes a faint sound of amusement at the nickname.

Even though she's tired, Leah sits back up and calls out to him just before he's about to leave— Totally missing all of the clues that the man was in a rush to get back downstairs. — she peeps, "Daddy?"

The man stops, turning to her with his eyebrows raised slightly as he silently waits for her to say something else. He looks so large in this room and it partly makes Leah want to laugh. But she had more serious matters to press. When she's silent, she watches him grow concerned and walk back over. "Penny for your thoughts?" He asks, digging into his pockets and making a disappointed tsk sound, "Looks like I'm all out."

The joke makes the little girl giggle again. Everyone else always gotten annoyed at her father's jokes but she always enjoyed them wholeheartedly. "I'll tell you anyways," She laughs.

He pulls his lips into a smile, bringing over a chair from her tea party set and sitting in it. "Good," He states. She thinks on how to word it without giving away that she was snooping, especially because it was Daddy. Not Dad. He was more observant and was able to catch onto things that the other one couldn't.

"What's love like?" She asks. She watches her father's face look at her in bewilderment at that, blinking his brown eyes and repositioning his head. It's not a tilt. More like a turn kind of.

Her dad makes a sound of discontentment, not towards her but something else. Almost kind of at himself or how the question had

been answered in his brain. There's a certain hesitance in his eyes. Then, sadly says, "Is it okay if I can only help you with a couple of forms? Can't promise I'll be too good at explaining this. This is probably a better question for Dad."

"How many forms are there?" She ponders out loud, eyes widening in the process. It causes Daddy to laugh but for some reason, he still looks sad.

He answers anyways, "A lot."

"Well," She starts, "I think that I already know about one. Family. I know that you and Dad love me, I know that my mommy and daddy loved me. I know that I love all of you and my baby brother and sister. So I don't need to know about that. Got that one all figured out."

"Yeah?" Her dad prods. For some reason, his voice seemed a little wobblier than usual and his eyes looked sort of glassy in the nightlight rays. It's the same expression that she had seen at Alec's birthday party a couple months back now. It confuses her then just as it does now because he had told her that it was a happy look but it came off as the complete opposite.

"Aye," She confirms.

"I'm glad that we can provide that for you..."

"That's what you're supposed to do, ye numpty." She giggles but her dad doesn't laugh with her, which is... She doesn't even know. It makes her chest hurt. But not because he had hurt her feelings but rather something about it just doesn't feel right. She knows her Daddy. Knows that whenever she laughs, he does.

Her own dies off as she tries to make his facial features out in the light but finds it hard to do so. He instead clears his throat before saying, "Don't let your father hear you say that. He won't be too happy with you. Anyways, why are you asking about love?"

His voice sounds better now. But Leah categorizes that tiny time frame where it wasn't into the many weird moments that the man seems to have whenever it comes to family, planning on asking about it someday. Every time that she wants to, he acts like everything is fine seconds after and tries to change the topic. It's almost like how she does when she's sad. But that doesn't make sense? Families are happy? Aren't they?

Hers is. She has four parents. Two in the sky and two down here. All of them have only ever showed her love and affection so she's confused on how Daddy can seem so sad at the mention of it.

But tonight's not the night. She's on a mission. "I want to know about romantic love," She informs him, "Like the stuff on my Disney movies."

The blond lets out a chuckle, seeming back to his usual self again. He shakes his head, telling her, "That's a complicated one."

"How come?"

The man does the head turning thing again, breaking eye contact with her. His face is puzzled. Almost like he himself didn't understand the answer that he had given her as he mumbles, "I don't know. Just is."

"But if two people love each other," She starts, sitting up, "Then what makes things so complicated?"

He gives her a small knowing smile. It's at that moment that she realized that he's starting to catch on. "Oi, what's this really about, monster?"

"You and Dad," She sighs in defeat, throwing herself back onto her bed. He blinks at her, eyes wide in shock as he awkwardly scratches at his chin. After he was done, he motions for her to go on with his hand as a curious look came across his face.

"I know that you love each other. I'm not a baby, you know."

Daddy laughs a genuine one at that. She crosses her arms at him, not actually mad but trying to come off as such to prove that she's old enough to get to the bottom of her parents' relationship once in for all. "Leah," He says calmly, "You're only five—"

She cuts him off, "Almost six!"

"Almost six. You're right, you're not a baby but you're also not as grown up as you're acting," He teases her, ruffling her hair as he does so. She pushes his hands away. Daddy then continues, "You let me and Dad worry about me and Dad, you copy?"

She mutters out in an annoyed tone, "I copy."

He gives her another kiss on the forehead before quietly instructing

her to get some sleep and putting the chair back. She watches his every movement. Leah was not at all satisfied by how the conversation had gone and she should've asked for Dad instead.

Daddy is so good at being private about things and she knows that he doesn't know that she notices that trait he has. Otherwise, she's sure he'd correct it. But something about the privacy around him while he urges for her and her siblings to talk about how they feel makes her wonder on why he is that way. It somehow makes him easier to read.

As he's about to walk out into the hall, she blurts, "But do you love him?"

He stops again, hand frozen on the doorknob and face unreadable as he's nothing but a giant shadow due to the light behind him. Her eyes open and close as she fights to stay awake. "Of course I do," The soft voice answers.

"I knew it," She mumbles, starting to fall back to sleep. As she drifts off, the door doesn't shut immediately and Leah feels safe allowing sleep to claim her knowing that he's watching out for her.

Simon awoke the next morning in an unfamiliar room with a steady weight pressed against his back. Last night, he hadn't experienced any nightmares. Which, was unusual. Most nights they tend to make him wake up at least four times throughout the span of his sleep and others he just doesn't sleep at all. He takes in his surroundings.

The first thing he notices is that he was in Johnny's room rather than his own. The second being that there was a tan arm wrapped around his waist in a loose manner as the body besides him snored silently into his neck. The events from last night came rushing back to him as a smile slowly found its way onto his face.

His whole body tingled at the memory of Johnny's touches against his skin. The soft kisses he had placed on all of his scars with a hazy look in his eye as he mumbled against the marred flesh, "You're downright bonnie, Si. Pure dead brilliant, this is."

He had started to catch onto what Scottish slang means what but bonnie had been new to him. But he had known that "pure dead brilliant" meant that something was very good so he hadn't asked for

any clarification, happy with that alone.

Simon rolls over. What he sees after he does so will be painted into his memory for the rest of his life. Johnny laid on the bed, blanket pooling over his waist and leaving out the bare, tan, sculpted chest. His hair was disheveled, brown strands falling into his face and waving slightly. His features were perfectly at peace, mouth left agape against the pillow with his eyes shut gently. All of this, plus the morning sun filtering in from the slightly drawn curtain that made parts of his skin glisten in the light and contoured all the others. Particles of dust flown in the air around him.

A proper beauty.

As if noticing the staring, Johnny slowly stirred. He cracks open one eye then closes it, a content and lazy smile growing on his features. "Morning," He croaks out. He shuffles closer with a satisfied hum.

Simon brings his arm up, allowing his hand to run through the long mohawk. After a bit of that, Johnny leans up and presses a long kiss to the blond's lips which he is happy to reciprocate, placing his hand on the back of the Scot's skull to deepen it. Their tongues lazily roam each other's mouths. Johnny makes a noise against his lips before bringing one leg over his hip and separating them to sit up. The position left Simon on his back, looking up at the man.

As he straddles him, Simon's hands find their way on to Soap's thighs. He admires the sight of the man on top of him, rubbing circles into the muscles underneath the skin. Meanwhile, Johnny's hands run up and down his chest, causing a slight shiver to take over the man. The brunet smirks at the effect. "You know what I was thinking we should do today, mo leannan?" Johnny asks, a teasing glint to his eye as they rake over the person underneath him.

Simon quirks an eyebrow in interest, gruffing out an, "What's that, love?" He had no idea what Johnny had said but he knows that it had to have been some term of endearment. So he had shot one right back. He watches the Scot's face turn red at the nickname.

Soap leans forwards, whispering, "Send the kids over to my parents for the next twenty-four hours so that we can have some time alone to... sort things out. You know, with building the deck?"

He then kisses Simon again with a bit more heat to it. Still, neither of them act any further beyond that as they part once again, both just enjoying the moment. Simon hums, "You know? That's seems like a

damn good idea, Johnny. There's just one problem."

Soap furrows his eyebrows together. Then Simon sits up, moving his hands from his thighs to his back. The action causes their chests to press together. He hears the small intake of breath that comes from the other man. Simon smirks before leaning in close to his ear and whispering, "It's Sunday. Your parents work tomorrow."

He lowers his upper body back down onto the mattress as Johnny throws back his head to let out an annoyed groan. What a sight that was. It causes his brain to feel fuzzy in the best way possible. The blond hooks a hand behind the Scot's neck, pulling forwards until they connect into a searing kiss.

Then, the door opens.

Both Simon and Johnny rip apart, immediately trying to cover themselves with anything around as the shorter man falls off the bed and there's a horrified, "Steamin' fucking Jesus!"

Soap's little sister stands in the doorway, covering her eyes with her two hands as she spins helplessly. Simon grabs at the duvet, using it to cover up and Johnny pushes himself up off the floor and wraps the sheets around his waist. "Clara!" He loudly growls out.

"John! Shut yer puss! Fuckin glaikit. Yer awff yer heid!" She shrills, stomping her feet, "Pure riddy."

Simon understands none of that. Johnny then yells out, accent thickening, "Ye can uncover yer eyes now, ye numpty. What the fuck were ye thinking just barging in like that? Yer doing my nut in with all this. Pure riddy? For who?"

As he scoffs, the younger Mactavish uncovers her eyes cautiously. Upon realizing it's safe, her face changes from terrified to defensive. She crosses her arms, glaring at him, "For me!"

"Yer bums oot the windae! How is this embarrassing for you? I'm the one in here naked as the day I was born after being walked in on by my little sister!" Soap argues back, the low timber in his voice there as he argues with his sister while his free hand whirls around wildly. The other gripping onto the sheets around his waist. Simon was honestly just grateful that he could at least understand that part of the conversation.

"I just walked in on you and Simon—" She covers her face again, "Oh

my God."

Johnny demands, "How did you even get in here? The door was locked."

She removes her hands, then bends down and grabs a small object off of the floor in front of her. The former lieutenant just lets out a shaky huff of amusement at the little key in her hands. He watches the man go through millions of emotions all at once after squinting to see the object. Once again, he settles on anger, yelling, "Hell slap it intae ye!"

He gestures at the her and then spins around, pinching the bridge of his nose. Clara places her hands onto her hips, "How? You two tell ma and da' all of the time that you aren't together. So how is my fault for coming into your room, expecting it to be just you in here?"

"Oh for fucks sake," Johnny retorts, whirling around to face her, "The door was locked. I could've been doing anything. Also, just so you know, Simon and I weren't currently going at it."

"Sure looks like you were. If you weren't, then explain," She bickers back, gesturing wildly to her own body up and down. The older brother looks down at his own sheet covered waist.

He takes a deep breath, putting his gaze on his sister again. Then, says patiently and slowly, "Currently."

Her face screws up into distress. She brings her perfectly manicured nails into her scalp, strands of her messy bun falling out as she does so. "John, the kids were literally awake," She scolds.

He could see Johnny slowly losing his rage, instead experiencing the same amount of stress that his sister was under. In all honesty, Simon was now sitting here slightly bored and wanting nothing more than to not be naked in front of Soap's twenty two year old little sister. "We just," Johnny says, spreading out the sentence word by word, "Woke up."

"You did it last night?" She whisper yells.

This causes Johnny to hiss back, "If it makes you leave then yes! Simon and I did *it* last night!"

There's little feet coming up the hallway and all three adults look at each other in horror. Immediately, Simon is regretting the thought of this whole debacle being boring earlier because the last thing that this

needs is one of their children walking in. "Aunt Clara! Is everything okay? Did you find them?" It's Alec.

Both Soap and Simon are now desperately gesturing for her to close the door while she stands frozen, mouth agape as she looks to them then back at her nephew. "Clara! Close the fuckin' door!" Johnny grits, stumbling over the sheets to grab a pillow off the bed.

He hurls it at her, causing her to slam the door shut in instinct. They stay silent for a moment, listening at the two muffled voices on the other side of the door but being unable to hear exactly what was said. Then two pairs of footsteps walk away.

The Scot visibly deflates. He buries his head into the mattress, letting out a scream that was luckily muffled by it. Simon could see that the tips of his ears were redder than he's ever seen on another human being in his life. "How are you not mortified right now?" Soap asks, still face first in the mattress.

He chuckles back, "I am a bit embarrassed. But it's not like she's my little sister or anything so it's more so for you than me. Although I'm dreading going downstairs to face her."

Which, was true. He was. Simon stands, walking over to his pants thrown by the bed and shucks them on while staring at his... (??) who has still not recovered. He kneels down next to him and mutters, "Johnny?"

"I'm never going to live this down. This is going to be told to generations worth of Mactavish's," He sits up, "One day, Sophie will be telling her kids funny stories about grandpa and grandad and she'll bring up the one time her aunt walked in on us mid make out session."

All Simon can do is laugh, not really having much to comfort him with right now. Afterwards, using two fingers to turn his head so that he can press a passionate kiss to his lips. Johnny's shoulders fall immediately. The stress seems to leave his body at the action as he places a palm on the blond's cheek.

They separate. "I'll see you downstairs, Mactavish," Simon says, going to grab his shirt and slipping it over his head. He can feel the former sergeant watching his every movement despite not being able to see him since his back is turned.

Soap manages out an, "Uh-huh."

“Take a cold shower or something before you come down,” He teases before leaving the room.

He makes his way down the hallway, smoothing back his long hair as he hears the sound of the shower turning on in the bathroom that’s connected to Johnny’s room. It makes him smirk.

Once he’s almost downstairs, Alec immediately runs around the archway separating the dining room and the living room. He looks at him in confusion. “Where were you?” The little boy demanded.

He froze on the stairs. What the hell does he even say? Simon’s not going to gaslight the poor boy but Johnny and him haven’t talked about telling the kids yet. They haven’t even had time to process or discuss it themselves. Usually, he’s pretty good at coming up with excuses but it seems all of them had left his brain at this point. “Uh,” The man helplessly lets out.

Leah looks up from the table from where she was coloring, squinting at him as her cold and calculating eyes scanned his body. “Why are you wearing those? You just had them on yesterday?” She interrogates.

“Oi, leave him alone!” Clara tells them, “Come set the table for breakfast.”

Simon decides to forgive her for this morning.

The man runs his hands through his hair one more time before stepping down into the dining room. He pads his way into the kitchen where he can smell the scent of eggs and bacon wafting around. He comes to stand next to Soap’s sister, investigating the food laying about on the breakfast bar. Clara looks up at him, smiling awkwardly. He darts his eyes away. “You made us breakfast?” He asks.

“Well, yeah. I couldn’t make it to the party yesterday because of some college bullshit so I’d figure I’d surprise him with an apology belated birthday breakfast. Turns out, I now have more to apologize for,” She says, grabbing a piece of bacon and chewing it, “You got a dog?”

Her movements were quick. Dodgy. Meanwhile, his were stiff and slow. There was a tension in the air that picked at both adults in an uncomfortable manner but they were trying to remain as normal as possible so the kids don’t catch on to something being off. Though, it seems they already have. Simon leans back to look in the corner at where the puppy sat, eyes focused on the platters of food on the

counter. "Yeah. Riley, no begging!" He scolds.

He picks up Riley and brings him out of the kitchen, placing him in the living room with a hand gesture to stay. The dog does not follow the command. Instead it follows him back into the dining room, wagging its tail wildly.

—

The kids were playing in the living room, Sophie included now that she's a bit older and everyone insisted that they don't need to watch over her like a hawk all of the time. Johnny and Simon disagreed. So, they were all still in sight.

All three adults sit around the dining room table, nursing coffees and teas while no one spoke a single word. They had already finished breakfast so there was no excuse to not discuss what had happened at this point. "Okay," Simon starts, "I'll go first. Clara, it's alright that you walked in on us. I'm not upset about it. Things like that happen sometimes. However, I am curious on how you got a key."

Clara takes the key out of her pocket, looking over it with a sad expression in her eyes. She explains, "After Anna bought the house, she made extra keys for all of the rooms to give to me just in case she lost one and the kids had locked themselves in a room or something. I had got here pretty damn early to surprise you, John.

"Then Alec came downstairs after a bit and told me that he couldn't find Simon anywhere and that your door was locked. So, thought I'd just check up on you. I didn't even stop to think that you guys were... You know."

Johnny laughs at his little sister, all anger from earlier had faded and instead a slight humor had replaced the emotion. He takes a sip of his coffee. "I mean, in your defense," He chuckles, "How could you have possibly known?"

"Still, I'm sorry," She winces, slumping in her seat a bit. Her older brother waves her off. Simon peaks around Clara to see the kids playing nicely and not even paying attention to the adults. Riley sits near them, head on Alec's lap as the little boy runs toy cars over his back while making "vroom" noises. It causes the blond to smile.

Soap comforts her by saying, "None of that. Just next time knock, aye? And for the love of God, don't tell Ma or Da' yet because I'm not ready for them to come into this house and start talking about a

wedding.”

That catches Simon’s attention. He snaps his attention over to the man next to him, eyebrows knitting together at the word “wedding.” Johnny stares at him for a moment before smiling as if he was the reason why the Earth moves. He’d be lying if he’d said it didn’t cause his heart to stop. Or a flutter in the pit of his stomach.

Still, he manages to question, “Wedding?”

“You know how my parents are, Si. The second we tell them that we’re together, they’re going to drive down here with mom’s big book of dream weddings for her children and start giving us the day and time we’re to be wed,” Johnny clarifies, resting his chin on the palm of his hand. Clara snorts. Then she points at her brother with a nod of her head before securely wrapping both hands around the mug again to take a drink.

She swallows down the liquid. It’s followed by her stating, “And there actually is a book. He’s not being overdramatic... For once.”

Johnny whips his head around to glare daggers at his little sister before crumpling up his napkin and catapulting it at her. It bonks against her forehead. She screws up her face in offense and snatches it off the table from where it landed. Then she throws it back. Instinctively, Simon reaches out to catch the object right before it can hit Soap’s face which definitely is something that comes from his overprotective nature over the man.

He tries not to feel embarrassed about saving Johnny from a napkin as he presses it into his jean pocket. Clara raises her eyebrows in interest, looking over at her brother and mouthing, “Protective. Hot.” Johnny kicks her under the table, face just as crimson red as it had been earlier when she caught them.

Simon sighs at their antics. He forgot about the sibling squabbles and was not looking forwards to them once all of the kids start to do it. Sure, they fight over toys and whatnot. But right now, it’s easy to deescalate. Once they’re older, it turns into moments like this and the bedroom earlier where they’re just bickering to bicker. Still, it’s all out of love. He knows that.

He had that.

He quickly shakes that thought away, not wanting to go down that specific tunnel right now. “So,” Clara trails off, “You gonna tell

them?"

She gestures her head backwards to where all three of the children were giggling in the next room. Johnny flinches, informing her, "We haven't really had time to discuss anything yet but... I'd assume so?"

Simon meets the gaze sent his way. Those blue eyes were hopeful but also he saw a bit of fear in them and he chooses to remember that so that he can ask about it later when Clara isn't here. He nods back at Johnny, smiling in hopes that it'll calm him. The Scot visibly relaxes and the look in his eye fades into nothing other than pure relief.

Clara darts her eyes between the two before abruptly standing, causing them to look at her instead. The kids do too. Riley even stands up to investigate the sudden outburst. "I should let you two be alone. If you want, I can take the kids to the park for a little bit? I promise they'll be fine."

That last part of the sentence was directed towards Simon if her pointed look his way was anything to go off of. See, usually he'd get defensive about something like that. But he knows he worries whenever Johnny or the kids aren't in his sight and it seems as if everyone else does too.

He chances a stare at the kids. Both Alec and Leah were now paying full attention to the conversation, eyes bulging out of their heads anticipation as they began to lean forwards subconsciously. A hand finds it's way onto his arm. He turns to find that Johnny is looking at him before giving him an almost imperceptible approval at the suggestion. He knows that they need to talk. Preferably without little ears around. But yet, the anxiety of not being there in case something happens was eating at him.

However, the kids seem excited. He's not going to be selfish. He refuses to be that type of parent. No matter what horrors he has seen, there's no real reason to refuse them some alone time with their aunt and he really does need to talk to Johnny anyways. He won't be controlling. Simon nods.

Clara turns to the kids with a wide smile on her face, "Go get your shoes on!"

The two eldest kids cheer, scrambling around to follow the order. Riley barks while chasing them. Soap's sister makes her way over to Sophie, picking up the youngest sibling as she looks around aimlessly at all of the commotion.

Once they're ready to go, they all line up at the door. But before they can leave Simon calls out, "Oi!" And makes a beckoning motion as he starts to dig in his pockets. Leah and Alec make their way over, eyes shining with confusion. Johnny even looks a bit lost.

He pulls out money, handing some to each. Before they're able to fully pull it away, he smirks at them and says, "What are ice cream cones like as parents?"

They look up at him, lips pulled up in big smiles at the hint of what the money was for. Alec starts to bounce on his heels. Leah actually genuinely seems interested in the joke itself as she asks, "I don't know. What are they like, Daddy?"

The use of that name causes Clara to blink in the background in surprise but both men are too focused on their children to even really comprehend it. A hand runs up Simon's back before landing at the nape of neck to scratch at his hair slightly. The blond looks back at the perpetrator, sending Johnny a wink. Then turns to the kids, leaning forwards to whisper, "They're big softies."

Both of the kids erupt into loud laughter as Simon lets go of the money and leans backwards fully into Soap's touch, face practically splitting in two with how big his grin was. After the laughter dies down a bit, Alec throws himself into his arms. The man lets out an "oof" sound before chuckling and hugging him back tightly, making a dramatic of it by turning back and forth as the young boy's shoed toes brush against the floor.

Next to him, Johnny's wrapping Leah up in her own embrace with a kiss to her forehead. "Be careful, mo ghràdh," He murmurs into her scalp.

She answers back, "Always am."

Then they trade off kids. Once all goodbyes are done, they watch the kids leave with Clara in the dining room window until the car is pulling off. He turns to Johnny, who scoffs, "They're going to have a sugar rush."

"If Clara's smart, she'll get them the ice cream first," He responds, moving in his chair to fully face the man next to him, "At least they appreciate my jokes. Unlike you."

Johnny gets that devilish look on his face again. The one that sends Simon reeling every damn time that it appears on his features. He has

no time to even recover before the Scot reaches down, grabbing the legs of the chair and pulling aggressively so that the blond is in closer range and the action has him quite literally holding his breath.

“Don’t be like that, Si,” He purrs, leaning forwards. Simon surges forwards again, kissing him feverishly. At first it’s rushed and needy but they manage to slow it down into a more sweet connection.

They detach, resting their foreheads on one another’s. Simon mutters into the space between them, “Behave yourself, Johnny. We still need to talk about things like how we’re going to tell the kids.”

“I’ll try,” The brunet sighs dramatically, fully pulling back as he continues, “So, where do we start?”

Simon looks over his reactions, trying to search for any type of hesitation or annoyance but rather finds complete openness. Love. It soothes a deep part of him that for some reason had been screaming at him that Johnny was just looking for fun last night despite the man begging him to stay. So, he bravely confesses, “I love you, Johnny. I have for a while. Since that night in Las Almas I knew that you were it for me and you know that I’m not just saying that.”

Johnny smiles at him. It’s the most beautiful thing that he’s ever seen and he can’t help but return the gesture. Simon reaches out to grab the man’s hands before continuing, “I didn’t fully tell you the truth when I first came here. While it’s true that I ran because I wasn’t thinking about my actions or how it would effect you, I did it because losing you hurt too bad. I didn’t want to face it.

“Johnny, you can’t be another person I can lose. I’m a little afraid of who I’d become if this somehow fails... It’s not just about you anymore . I love those kids *so much*. So, I guess I just need some sort of promise that we will give this our best go.”

Johnny’s eyes become thick with emotion as he reaches out and pulls the blond in for a quick press of their lips. Then, rests his hand on his cheek. Simon closes his eyes and cups over the hand with his own, leaning into the warm touch. “Simon,” Soap says, so quietly that one could barely hear it.

Simon opens up his eyes to see the beautiful man staring back at him with so much determination. So much love. It almost sends the former lieutenant into a starstuck stupor. “You’re all I’ve fought for for the past couple of years,” Johnny admits, “I worked to attempt to break down those walls, to become your friend, to form a trust between us—

All just so I could maybe get this one day. When I had been told that I was the guardian of these children, there was a part of me that wanted to refuse so I could come back to you. But, then, you came to me instead.

“And even if this wasn’t meant to turn out like this, it did. I could never ask for anything more. These kids? This house? Hell, even the fuckin’ dog? All of it is perfect. I meant it when I said was yours last night, Simon. I’ve loved you for just as long as you’ve loved me. And I still do. In fact, my love for you has matured into something that I didn’t even know was possible. I’m yours. Fully.”

Simon could fucking cry. And maybe, he does. It’s not everyday that everything you never knew that you wanted is laid out on the table for you to just have with no exceptions. Yeah, Ghost loved Johnny. But the life that he was living now? Beyond comprehensible to that man many months ago bleeding out and looking at the sky, wishing to just see his love one more time.

He never knew that he could be that soldier. The lieutenant had always thought of those men as pitiful. Love was a weakness. There was no place for it in war and it’ll only bring you down. That was, until Johnny. If Simon could, he’d write a book called “Until Johnny” and encapture their story within it for their next of kin to read. To pass down through generations.

To remind the world that a dead man on his feet can still love.

This life they had built had never been an option in Ghost’s head, even though it was something similar to what he heard other soldiers, including Soap, hoping for some day. Part of him always yearned for it to be him when Johnny had offhand mentioned that he wants a house in Scotland one day with a couple of kids. But he didn’t allow himself to want it, convinced it wasn’t possible.

And yet....

“Mine,” Simon says, brain turning a bit fuzzy again at it. Soap nods, grabbing his shirt collar and pulling him forward. At the same time, he pulls the man onto his lap again as they both grin widely at each other.

“All yours,” Johnny repeats, “I’m only yours.”

He lets loose a joke to lighten the tension crackling between them a bit, “So, Ava had no chance then, huh?”

The former sergeant laughs at that, pressing a kiss on his lips and murmuring against them, “Never in a million years.”

Simon kisses him properly but lazily. Part of him is amazed at how many times their lips had met since last night and he wonders faintly if this is what people call the “honeymoon phase.” Unable to keep their hands off of each other or their lips to themselves, big smiles on their faces and a happiness so surreal in their chests.

He hopes it never fades. No, scratch that. He refuses to let it fade. This is who he wants to spend the rest of his life with and he’ll make damn sure that he’s going to do it.

They pull apart again, Soap letting out a huff of content before using his calloused fingers to brush back the long, blond strands from the man underneath of him’s face. Simon looks up at him as if he’s an angel amongst men. Something to be worshipped. “Pure bonnie. Quite the opposite, indeed,” Johnny breaths out.

“As in,” Simon smiles, “‘Show my face?’ quite the opposite?”

All Johnny does is make a sound of confirmation, still running his fingers along Simon’s face. He traces each scar, his eyebrows, the slope of his nose. Then, lands on his lips and exchanges the finger for a thumb to run it across the bottom one. His face looks entirely focused. As if in a trance. “You weren’t lying. Been wanting to tell you that for a while now,” he mumbles.

“Course I wasn’t, Johnny. I don’t lie. You know, you’re not so bad yourself.”

Johnny smirks at him, voice getting rougher as he says, “Oh, how you flatter me, sir.”

“It my job,” Simon shrugs simply. Tone not wavering. As if the answer was obvious. To him, it was even if it sounds slightly pathetic that he now fully thinks of that as his job. No more shooting people. Mechanic’s apprentice? A side hustle.

His true job in his eyes was to make sure that Johnny and the kids remained as happy as clams. It was his mission. Everyone knows that Simon needs one to function anyways, otherwise he’d be a complete mess of a man. It’s totally not what he would’ve ever expected from himself and he used to laugh at men who told him the same thing about their families.

But again, that was before Johnny.

“So, how do you want to tell the kids?” Simon asks. The man on top of him sighs at the question, no longer wanting to talk about serious topics but knowing that that one was an important one. He resists the urge to laugh at the impatience.

Chapter End Notes

THEYRE SO HSHJSNSNNDNDNFNNDNDNDNSNDNND



If you want to come hangout at all, here's my

tumblr: @gaylittleeddie

tiktok: @mxrkies.edits

no twt!! sorry

Telling The Kids

Chapter Summary

Telling the kids that they're together :)

Chapter Notes

Short chapter today since I have a headache and didn't want to make this a multi plot chapter. Just wanted them telling the kids to be its own one.

May be bleh because headache be bleh. I hope you enjoy it anyways :)

No second chapter today to make up for it bc again head hurt :(took medicine and did not help. I overslept today because it's raining so that's probably it.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Johnny and Simon relax on the couch, waiting for the little ones to get back while watching reruns of Kitchen Nightmares. Both were now showered. The house was clean. There was literally nothing else for them to do besides cuddle and wait for the kids to come home. "You moving to my room? It's bigger and I have a bathroom... We could turn your room into a gym since we don't have one of those anymore and I hate having to go to one only on Saturdays," Soap speaks into the silence.

He runs his hand through the blond locks of the man resting his head on Johnny's lap, massaging Simon's scalp every once in a while. It feels so nice to finally be able to do this. Part of him wonders why they waited so long while another part of him thinks that the wait was totally worth it. "Maybe," Simon responds.

"Maybe?!" He demands in complete disbelief, "Why maybe?"

He feels the former lieutenant's body move with a silent laughter at his obvious distress. Then he says, "Ask dumb questions, you get dumb answers, Johnny."

A large smile forms on Johnny's face as his heart warms in his chest at his boyfriend's teasing. He leans down, pressing a featherlight kiss on his cheek before resuming his attention back to the show. "Didn't

think it was a dumb question,” He mutters. He feels Simon shift so that the he is looking up at him.

Then, a hand grabs at the collar of Soap’s shirt and tugs him downwards until their lips meet at an somewhat awkward angle. Still, he appreciates it. He feels the grip on his shirt loosen until it lets go completely as the limb slides it’s way to cup at the back of his neck. Johnny hums at the movement.

This is what heaven is. He’s convinced. Growing up, he had been raised as a religious man but that had slowly dissipated over time. That can happen when you see the things he’s seen and you are who he is. The church didn’t seem that welcoming anymore. So he gladly let it go. But it was a good idea since they obviously had no idea what they were on about.

Heaven wasn’t some pearly gates in the sky. No. It was having the ability to be kissed by Simon Riley and love him for the glory that he is.

This is all Johnny could’ve asked for. Nights spent wishing that his lieutenant hadn’t been so adamant on not having a future outside of the military, praying that maybe one day he’d change his mind. Because he doesn’t think he’d be able to do it with anyone else. Once Ghost had come into his life and allowed him into his, Soap had decided that there will never be anyone else that he wanted that bad. Before when he’d thought about a future, the person in his imaginative scenarios had been nothing but a incomprehensible body with blurry face. But then, it turned into pale skin and brown eyes. Blond hair.

At the time he had thought it was impossible. But now, he realizes it’s not. It never was. They detach and Simon stares up at him with a dazed grin as he mumbles, “We did this all out of order, you know? The kids already call us both dad and now we’re going to tell them that their dads are actually together now.”

“Leave it to us to never do anything smoothly, Lt. Always gotta have a wee bit of of chaos,” Johnny chuckles.

“L.t,” Simon ponders out loud, “Haven’t called me that one in a while, Johnny.”

He hadn’t even realized that the old nickname had slipped from his mouth. When the kids are around, he makes a point to never refer to Ghost in any way shape or form since he knows that Simon doesn’t

like it. So, the beloved nickname had gone out the window. “Huh... Guess I haven’t,” He considers.

“Missed it. You should start calling me that again,” The other man says, eyes crinkling in the corners. The Scot couldn’t help but feel slightly surprised at the request since he had never shown any signs of ever approving of it. “You actually liked that?”

Simon’s face turns into one of amusement as he shakes his head. “If I hadn’t,” He sits up, causing the words to be slightly strained, “I would’ve knocked you on your ass. Kids are home, by the way.”

“What? How do you—“

He’s interrupted by the door flying open so aggressively that it bounces off the wall and causes Soap to jump practically out of his skin. “Dad! Daddy!” Two little voices call out. Then a body crashes into him as Alec clambers onto his lap, talking way too fast and way too quietly for him to even begin to understand what is being said to him.

Leah stands next to Simon, trying to give him change but the blond keeps sticking his palm out in refusal even as she tries to force it into his grip. Clara walks in, setting Sophie on the ground. Riley immediately trots over to her to start smelling her face, as if making sure that she’s alright. The baby giggles. Then starts crawling towards Soap, cheering “Da Da Da” as she goes.

Eventually she pulls herself onto her feet, using his pant leg to do so. “Da da!” She screeches, sounding a bit frustrated as she slaps at his thigh in a demand for attention. Johnny readjusts Alec so that he’s sitting on one of his legs in order to reach down and set Sophie on the other. “Steamin’ Jesus it was only a couple hours, you heathens,” He teases.

“It felt like a lifetime,” Leah groans dramatically. Clara laughs at her niece and begins setting down the diaper bag by the door where it usually goes.

Simon watches Leah stomp around with her head thrown back to emphasize her point. Then, he looks at his boyfriend and states, “She got that from you.”

Johnny just smiles back innocently. He can’t really argue against that. It’s the truth. That’s the exact way that he tends to whine about things when he feels like being a tad overdramatic. The head thrown back

and everything. So, there's no defending himself against that accusation and they both know it.

"You wanna talk about getting things from people," Clara says, sitting on the second couch nearby, "Let's talk about how Alec here won't stop looking at people with that... Simon look." She motions to her own face in a circular motion to highlight her point while the man in question maneuvers himself to look at the boy full on. Johnny does also.

Alec's mouth is rested in a slight frown and his eyebrows are pinched. Soap could recognize expression anywhere. He darts his eyes over to the former lieutenant and sure enough, the little boy is a perfect mimic of his other dad's resting face. The Scot resists the urge to laugh outwardly at the realization as he snickers, "People are going to think the lad is miserable. No offense, Si."

"None taken," Simon responds quietly, furrowing his eyebrows as he inspects their son. They then turn to Clara. She's watching the scene with her own brow quirked up. Both men shrug.

She sighs loudly, slapping her hands on her thighs as she stands up. "Well, I'm going to get going," She informs the family, making her way over to John and pressing a kiss to his cheek, "Love you. Happy birthday, old bastard."

"Yeah, yeah. Love you too," He grumbles back. Twenty eight is not old. He's still in his prime, thank you very much, and anyone who says that it's old is just simply wrong. She hugs each of the kids and then gives a fist bump to Simon, knowing that he feels awkward with the whole physical affection aspect. She waves and walks out.

"You be safe, wee yin!" Soap yells after her which she just shoos off. Then, she's gone. Johnny and Simon make eye contact as the younger of the two men lets out a shaky sigh, nodding to each other. Leah watches the interaction, squinting.

The Scot moves to place Alec onto the coffee table. This causes the young boy to tilt his head at his father while screwing up his expression in curiosity while Leah slowly makes her way over to sit next to him. The eldest of the children can sense the serious conversation coming. The way she intently flickers her blue orbs between them is enough evidence of that. "Me and your father wanted to talk to you about something," Johnny starts.

He feels a hand slip into his. A nervousness bubbles its way into the

brunet's stomach as he preps himself to tell the children. It doesn't make sense. He knows that it doesn't make a difference to them, in fact they might even get overly excited at the news. Still, it's nerve wracking. He feels a comforting squeeze come from his boyfriend. "Some things may be slightly different now and you know we don't like to keep things from you. How you feel is always important to us and we wouldn't want you to think otherwise."

Leah and Alec both nod, staring at the two with wide eyes full of anxiety and wonder. Maybe some people would've waited a bit to tell their children. Test out the waters. See if they work. But both Simon and Johnny agree that this will always work. They have practically lived a lifetime together, despite it only being a couple years at most but their relationship has been tested beyond any normal limits. Betrayal, close calls, separation— But somehow they always come back to each other.

They choose each other over and over again; have been doing so long before they actually physically got together. The only difference in their relationship now is it has finally spilled over into the romantic side rather platonic, even though it's been tilting that way for a while now.

Johnny takes a deep breath, exhaling out, "We're together now. Romantically. Like how Gaz and Callie are or Grandma and Granda' are."

The kids blink at him while Sophie babbles to herself, chewing on the ear of her stuffed dog she had grabbed from the couch. He feels Simon squeeze harder. But then, Leah cheers out, "I knew it! I told you, Alec!"

Alec giggles at his sister's outburst while Simon and Johnny just watch her prance around in shock. She dances around repeatedly singing that she knew, as if it was her victory lap. Both of the men had no idea what to really do about it except for laugh at her. Her brother sits up straighter, asking, "Does this mean you're getting married?"

The fathers whip their heads into each other's directions, staring at their partner with eyes the size of golfballs at the question. Johnny turns back, stammering out, "No- No bud. Not yet."

"Not yet?" Leah squeals, running back over, "But you will be?"

Can they even get married? Simon is technically dead for fucks sake. That brings a whole new complication to that topic but it's not like the

kids know about that. And he's pretty sure that they never should know. It would be way too hard to explain. Possibly dangerous for them to know as well and Johnny doesn't even know why he's technically dead. Just that he is.

That doesn't seem to bother Simon, though. Instead, the man just laughs, "That's the plan, monster."

"Can Sophie and I be the flower girls?"

Sophie screams loudly at the mention of her name and Leah takes that as a sign that she agrees. She gestures to her baby sister, eyebrows practically to her hairline as if saying "see, I told you so." All the blond does is nod. The little girl pumps her fists in a celebratory motion— something that she's no doubtedly seen Soap do.

Johnny just sits there, listening to Leah plan their wedding as she talks about flowers and color schemes. He wonders if she's been hanging around his mother too much. It seems as if everyone is jumping straight to the wedding without even knowing if there will be one. Hell, he's done it way before they were even together. The way that Simon had said that that was the plan so confidently had done things to his heart. As if he's thought about it too. Maybe he has.

"Alright," He silences the room, tone light, "Enough with the wedding talk. You're beginning to sound like your grandmother, who we aren't telling yet. This is our little secret for now, aye?" He places a finger on his lips to emphasize the point. Both kids mock the movement, making a shushing noise as they do so. Upon seeing that, Sophie attempts to as well as she places a hand to her mouth and promptly spits everywhere.

"Ew!" Alec reacts, standing and jumping away from her. Sophie laughs. Simon sighs, taking a part of his t-shirt and wiping the saliva from Soap's arm along with her face.

"Are you guys hungry?" The blond asks. Leah and Alex answer affirmatives. Literally. The word affirmative. Johnny wonders if they really talk in military slang that often and what their future teachers will think of their speech patterns. That's a problem for future them, however.

"I'll go make something," Soap stands, placing Sophie in her walker. The baby kicks her feet around instantly and laughs at the toys on the object. He adds, "Behave."

The kids flash him their teeth. He's walking into the kitchen and can hear Simon trailing behind him. Just as he's about to reach for the bread, two hands grip at his waist and spin him around. His back hits the counter. "You know," The man whispers, "You were hinting at wanting a ring a while back. Why the hesitance now?"

Johnny blinks at the totally serious but suggestive look on Simon's face, mouth gaping. He brings his own limbs up to rest on his partner's neck and head, scratching underneath the blond hair there as he searches for any type of joke. None. "Simon, we have been officially in a relationship for one day, you can't be serious," He muses.

The thumbs resting on his hip bone start to move in comforting circles as a sheer determination shines in those beautiful brown eyes. He practically pleads, "I know what I want, Johnny. What's the wait?"

The Scot lets out a sound of amusement, moving to grab at the taller man's cheeks and pull him forwards so that their lips meet. Once parted again, Johnny informs, "Well first things first, I'm actually a huge hopeless romantic. Watched a lot of romcoms in my day. So I'd prefer our proposal be a wee bit more romantic than this and I'm going to totally knock your socks off when I do, just so you know. Secondly, let us adjust a bit first. Then we can get married."

He's smiling at Simon so brightly. In a way that's so unfamiliar to his face that he's not sure if it's ever made that expression before. They lean in, trading another chaste kiss.

For once, Johnny allows himself to forget about the whole legally dead thing. They can still get married. It just might be without any real certification but they'll still know in their hearts that they're each others. Who cares about technicalities anyways? "I'm going to beat you to it. I hope you know that," Simon smirks.

"Oh, don't make this a competition, Si," He warns with no real heat, just a teasing tone, "Because I'll win."

"You seem awfully sure about that, Mactavish."

"Maybe I'm just a confident man, L.t."

Simon scoffs out, "That's for sure. Then he's placing a gentle kiss on the top of Johnny's head and stepping back to let him start the sandwiches. They've agreed a long time ago that the only meal that he is allowed to prepare is lunch since his cooking is nothing short of a disaster. However, the former lieutenant's is godly. It's something that

may even make Gordon Ramsey himself proud.

Gordon Ramsey vs Simon Riley in an argument. Now that's something that Johnny would pay some good money to see. He laughs at the thought, shaking his head at the foolishness of the most unlikely scenario to man.

His boyfriend comes up behind him, placing his chin on the top of Soap's head as his chest presses against his back. He doesn't make any move to wrap his arms around his waist or anything in that nature. Just stands. It's such an odd form of affection but something about it is so uniquely Simon that it warms his heart anyways.

Chapter End Notes

Who do u think is going to win the great Proposal war?

Growing

Chapter Summary

The kids go back to school shopping. Johnny spirals about the future a bit in the middle of a store aisle.

Simon has a breakdown but Johnny reminds him that he's safe and that he's not alone anymore. They get through it together.

Alec has his first panic attack.

Chapter Notes

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a panic attack from an outsiders pov is described in the very last section. Please be cautious while reading it

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"So you want to have one last hurrah before school starts?" He asks as he pushes the cart. Leah is scanning the aisles as they walk, running her hands along backpacks as she goes while Alec follows her instead of looking as he's still not old enough to start school. Sophie sits in the cart, chewing on her teething ring.

"Aye! Nothing too big. Just want Uncle Gaz and Aunt Callie to sleep over with Addie!" She informs him, whipping around to jump onto the cart as she does so. He gives her a warning glance and she understands that she's not allowed to do that immediately. She steps off.

Simon lets out a slight laugh beside him. He turns his head to look at the taller man, whose eyes were crinkled up in a sign that he was smiling at her antics. It makes Soap's heart sore. That look, even if partially hidden by a surgical mask, will never get old. "It's going to be hard for them to sleep over, wee yin," Johnny informs his daughter, turning his gaze onto a pack of highlighters and grabbing at them, "Addie isn't old enough yet. I can see if they can come over but they won't be able to spend the night."

Both children deflate at that. Ultimately, they understand. They

continue on shopping afterwards, allowing the kids to pick out what they want. Leah tries her best to grab a Frozen backpack, jumping up and down to reach for it. Simon lets out a chuckle, making his way over and unhooking it for her. She gives him a grateful look as he places it in the cart.

"Hey Johnny," The blond mumbles, placing an hand on his boyfriend's back. The Scot looks over at him, furrowing his eyebrows together at him as he does so. That tone. He doesn't like it. It's the one that the former lieutenant uses when he's about to gently remind Soap of something that he's not quite ready to face yet. Usually with Sophie. "I think it's time we start looking for stuff that Sophie can take to daycare with her. We both agreed that once she starts walking, we're going to start sending her to daycare with Alec so that we can get jobs. She's going to eight months in September. That's usually when they start walking, according to Google."

Johnny blinks at him. He brings his gaze to Sophie as the girl stares at him with a big grin on her face. Her hair was tied up in a little pony with a bow. At that moment, he realized that he couldn't picture not spending all day every day with her and his heart panged. "No," He whines. Then, picks her up and clutches her to his chest, placing his hand on the back of her head.

Soap remembers holding her like this when she was much smaller. His eyes rake over the two other kids. Alec's sentences had improved and he could walk much more sturdier. Hell, he had a birthday. He was four rather than three. Leah was getting taller. It struck him that they were getting older and there was nothing he could do. He wishes he could freeze time. Stop all of them from growing up.

To keep them the age that he came to them at. Simon gives him a soft look. It was full of patience and understanding as the shorter man squeezed Sophie. "Can't we just," He places a kiss on the top of the youngest's head, "Keep them this age forever?"

"Johnny, you know that we can't," Simon soothes. It's really not fair. What is he going to do as time moves forward? It hasn't even been a year and he's already dreading them growing up. One day they're going to go off to college or whatever they choose to do with their lives and what is he supposed to then?

What are they supposed to do? Sit in that big house with Riley? Will Riley even live that long? It's a hard realization that no. The dog probably fuckin won't. Their whole family as they know it will simply

just not be one day. All doing their own things. "You solid, Johnny?" Simon asks, taking him out of his thoughts.

"No, ye spooky bitch. You just caused me to spiral," He snaps with no real heat, "Fucking hell, Si."

Simon laughs at that and lightly takes Sophie from his arms. He presses his lips onto Johnny's forehead through the mask and then motions for them to continue walking before turning to the little girl in his arms and bouncing her while saying in a high pitched voice, "You want to pick out a bag like your siblings? Huh, sunshine?"

She giggles loudly, gripping onto his shirt. Soap watches the scene with a slight sad smile on his face as the blond makes his way over to the smaller bags. He points at them, eyes crinkled. Sophie leans forwards, grabbing at a one with butterflies while screaming. "Inside voice, Sophie," The man reminds her.

Honestly, they're constantly trying to get her to use her "inside voice." Johnny thinks back to the conversation that he had had with his own father about how cheerful of a baby he had been and wonders yet again if it'll carry into her adulthood like it had with him. He hopes so.

—

They make their way into the front door, Leah urging them to hurry up so that she can put her new bag together as soon as possible. It's an adorable sight, really. She seems so excited by the idea of making it to the next grade. Johnny remembers what it was like back when he was younger and his parents would prep him and his siblings for the new school year. He always adored it. It was the only thing about school that he liked, if he's honest.

The adults shake their heads, fond grins on the faces as they watch her run into the living room. Simon slips his shoes off and walks over to her, placing down both Sophie and the bags while Alice follows behind. Johnny takes this moment to make his way into the kitchen, checking off the "Back to school shopping" off the board on the fridge. The satisfaction of getting that done only lasts for a moment, however. Something else eats at him.

He stares at the list.

"The checklist isn't done," He deadpans. Ghost halts the movement of taking off the mask, raising an eyebrow at him. He sighs, adding on, "I

have a daily checklist that I keep in my head. If it's not done, I don't rest until it is. That's my rule. That way, I don't let my ADHD procrastinate the things I have to do for the kids. It creates less stress later on."

"You definitely didn't do that while under my command," Simon jokes, sitting down next to him with a groan.

The memory brings a warmth to his chest as he grabs the marker and writes down at the bottom of it, "*FUTURE????*" He hears footsteps come up behind him before two strong arms wrap around his waist, pressing him flush against a muscled body. Soap reaches up, scratching at the other's hair. "Future, huh?" Simon mumbles.

Johnny makes a noise of confirmation, staring the word dauntingly. Future. What exactly is he supposed to do now? He knows for a fact that he doesn't want to work in an office for the rest of his life. As the images of him in a suit and tie everyday while completing monotonous tasks flash in his brain, he can't help feel a heavy disinterest in the idea. It's nothing against people who do that. It's just not something that he wants for himself.

"I have no idea," Johnny says, "What I'm going to do with the rest of my life."

Simon presses a gentle kiss on his neck. Then murmurs, "You'll figure it out, love. No rush."

"Are you happy with the idea of working for my dad? You know, fixing cars?"

Simon's eyebrows pinch at the question. He makes a hum of consideration at it but doesn't say anything for a while. Johnny's fine with that. He knows that sometimes his partner just needs a moment or so to really think about things when it boils down to topics like emotions. So, they can sit in silence.

They can do that for as long as he needs to do.

"I've never thought about jobs from that point of view, honestly. It's always just been about survival or distracting myself from the things going on in my life. I had no other choice. Men like me aren't given the option to follow our dream careers. I take what I can in order to get out or stay alive," Simon answers, a troubled expression on his face. Johnny turns in his arms and makes sure that their eyes connect. There's no sadness tainting those brown orbs; just this wistfulness as if he feels like he's missing out on something that other people have.

Simon has those moments often. When Johnny says something sometimes about life experiences he's had, the blond will get this look of confusion on his face before that same yearning takes over. He wishes he knew why. What caused it. It doesn't take a rocket science to know that the former lieutenant has had it rough in his lifetime and he's sure that if he finds out the details, it'll haunt him. The scars on his body, no matter how beautiful, were a physical reminder that something— or multiple things— had happened to the man that he loves so dearly. Still, he patiently waits for the day Simon wants to tell him. And when he does, he'll be the support that he needs.

"Hey," Johnny says gently, "Some people don't need to feel a passion in the thing that they do. But you don't have to fight to survive anymore and if you need any form of distraction, just remember that I'm here to help you through whatever's going on your head, okay? You're not alone, Simon. And you don't have to fight to survive anymore. You can allow yourself to feel peace."

Simon stares at him so openly. His eyes start to redden as tears well up in them and he tightens his jaw in attempt to hold it back. That just won't do. Soap needs him to know that he's safe to express any feeling that he has. So, the brunet reaches out and places a gentle hand on his cheek, running a thumb along the scar that rests there while he moves his head back and forth gently. A disapproval. A begging of him not run. To not hide his emotions.

Upon seeing that, a dam breaks in Simon. He lunges forward with a choked out noise and wraps Johnny in the tightest hug that he's ever received in his life. Soap mumbles, "You're safe, mo leannan. I got you."

"I don't know what peace is, Johnny," He sobs out, burying his face into the crook of his lover's neck. That sentence breaks Johnny's heart. It furthers the existing theory that not just one thing happened to this man but several.

He squeezes Simon just a bit tighter. "It's okay. We can help you figure it out," He comforts. The sound of laughter carries in from the living room, soothing both of their souls. The man continues to break. But Johnny doesn't push, even if he wants to know everything. If he does, Simon will only pull back. It's another thing that he's not entirely sure of its origin.

He used to feel as if he was one side of the glass with him on the other. They'd stare at each other. Johnny would wait patiently for him

to tell him anything about himself but each and every time, those walls would grow thicker. He could see Simon. Could tell that he was right there. Just out of reach. But every time that he tried to touch or to get a solid grasp, it would only be met with the feeling of coldness stopping him. The glass.

But now he knows that they're both sitting on one side together. Simon keeps darting his eyes over to the huge brick wall that's slowly cracking at the seams. He's scared. that terrorized expression would fall onto Johnny as he reaches out to push him back from the object with that creaked with effort. It wanted to break. But the man next to him was too scared that once it did, it would crush them both with heavy stone.

Simon holds back his past not just to protect himself but to protect those around him. He fears it. Fears the weight that it brings. The crushing reality of something so horrifying that if it is spoken, it would make everything too real. Too much. Maybe, Johnny thinks, he believes that it would be too much for anyone but him to handle. As he even struggles with it.

"I'm here," Soap reminds him, "I'm not going anywhere. You're safe."

Simon cries harder at that and Johnny knows that all of the things he had just thought were true. A part of him fears that rejection. The sneers of "That's too much for me to handle. You got a lot of baggage." And being tossed to the side.

It's so unfair. Everything that has happened is out of his control yet he's the one that suffers the most. The one that feels as if people will leave. Johnny pulls away, grabbing Simon's cheeks and forcing him to make eye contact with him. "I'm here," He says with a little more conviction, "Whatever it is, I'm here. Whenever you're ready to share it with me. Whether it be now or later, I'm here."

"Johnny..." He trails off, voice thick with emotion.

Johnny responds back, with a light tug, "I promise."

Simon searches his face, tears dropping from his waterline as he does so. He looks for any lie. Anything that hints that it's just being said to be said. It's not distrust. It's a comfort to the blond.

"Alright, Johnny," He croaks, "Alright."

"You're safe."

"I'm safe."

They crash into another bone crushing hug. Johnny desperately tries to show him that the words he's said were nothing but true. That they have each other. Simon doesn't need to tell him everything yet. As long as he understands that. "I love you, Johnny."

"I love you, Simon."

"You better," He teases, pulling away and wiping the tears from his face. Johnny cracks a small smile at him. Then, takes a hold of his face to bring him down enough for him to kiss away the salty waterlines instead in attempt to take away that pain to his best ability.

Simon lets out a sigh of content. They look into each other's eyes again as Soap whispers, "Always have. Always will."

"I don't deserve you..." the blond breathes out shakily. How could he think such a thing? Why would he think that? It's Johnny who doesn't deserve someone like him. The former lieutenant cares so much about those around him, even when people swore that he didn't.

"You deserve happiness. You deserve peace. Simon, you deserve all of this," Johnny tells him, "The life that we've built is ours and you have deserved every last second of it. In fact, you deserve more."

"How come you've only ever seen the good in me?"

The Scot frowns at that. He informs him with so much earnestness that he's sure that whole base who only saw the negative can feel it, "Because that's all there is."

Simon searches his eyes again. No lies. Only truth. The man surges towards him, connecting their mouths together in a kiss filled with so much passion and so much love that it makes Johnny weak in the knees. He fists onto his partner's shirt, pressing harder.

He tries pour it into the cracks in Simon's soul that there is nothing but good in him. That everyone else who saw different had been lying. How could there be bad?

More importantly, he tries to communicate that there was nothing wrong with the man he was before either. Ghost. Even then, the man had so much care in his being behind that stony wall that he had put up. Behind that reputation. He had waited for a broken soldier that was as good as dead, told Rudy and him that no one's fights alone—

That the betrayal had happened under his watch.

Took responsibility for something that he couldn't have possibly predicted. There was no way of knowing that Graves or Shepherd had been hostiles. They had fooled them. Yet, Ghost had cared so much that it had happened, that he hadn't seen it coming.

He was always good. Both Simon and Ghost, despite the reputation that looms over each version of the same man, were nothing but that. He prays that he gets that across. They depart.

In Simon's eyes reflects everything. It's an understanding. They breathe into each other's space with a new sort of calm passing between them as the blond hushes, "I love you."

"Ew!" Alec squeals out. They turn their attention onto the little boy who giggles and covers his eyes. Johnny erupts into a smile.

"Ew?" He repeats, voice filled with a light disbelief. He leans down, creeping his way into the little boy's space with a, "Maybe you shouldn't be snooping."

Alec attempts to run away, screaming happily as he goes but his dad is faster and scoops him off of his feet into a cradling position. The boy cackles. "Huh?" Johnny asks. Simon lets out a huff of amusement somewhere behind him at them.

"I wasn't snooping!" Alec denies, the lie clear as day.

"Then what was ew, huh?"

He laughs out a, "Nothing!"

Johnny tickles him, causing the boy to giggle loudly and yell, "Daddy help!"

Simon laughs at that, leaning his hip against the kitchen counter and crossing his arms. He looks ten times lighter than he had before that conversation had happened. He raises his hands in surrender, "Maybe you shouldn't have been spying on us."

Soaps stops tickling him and looks over at his boyfriend, saying, "He was a little too good at that. Didn't even notice he was there. Should we be worried about that at all?"

"I don't know," Simon answers while he shrugs, "Probably."

Johnny makes slight hum, staring down at his son in his arms who's smiling up at him all innocent like. Alec was quiet. And apparently very sneaky. It's not surprising considering the two men that he's being raised by but it's still a slight concern to him. "Huh," He states noncommittally.

That's a problem for future them to worry about. Maybe they'll put a cow bell on him.

It's way past bedtime for both Simon and the kids. Johnny had spent half of the night tossing and turning with flashbacks of his time in the service haunting him every time he attempted to close his eyes. Eventually he had just given up on sleeping. So now he's sitting over plans to build a deck that he had drawn in his new sketchbook with a lukewarm coffee resting a little ways in front of him. The only light on being the one in the corner of the living room.

He was on the floor, leaning over to draw in the book from where it rested on their coffee table. There was no room to put any desk since they were planning on turning Simon's old room into a gym for both of their sakes. Johnny so that he can work out every day. Simon because he liked the privacy better. So Soap's workspace was really any quiet place he could sit.

He didn't mind that much. A whole area dedicated to that would only be a waste of money since it's not like he's coming up with new projects often. He erased a mark, not liking how it didn't seem to work like he pictured it in his head.

"Dad?" A little voice calls out. He turns his attention towards where it had come from. Alec stands in the archway, still in his pajamas, with wet cheeks and a wobbling bottom lip. Alarm courses through him.

Johnny drops the pencil immediately. "Hey," He greets gently. The child rushes forwards, wrapping his arms around his neck tightly. "Wee yin, what happened?" He questions.

"I had a nightmare about mommy and daddy," He sniffles. The man brings up a hand to rub comforting circles on the boy's back, shushing him as he sobs in his arms. Jeez, seems like no one's getting a break from horrors of the past in the MacTavish household today.

"Alright," Johnny whispers, "Do you want to talk about it?"

“No,” He responds, pulling away and letting out shaky but quick breaths. The alarm turns into pure dread as he registers the hazy look in the boy’s eyes as he reaches back to the couch before crashing down onto it. It dawns on him what’s happening almost as soon as it starts, knowing that he’s seen it so many times before.

Hell, he’s been there. The world spins and tilts as you feel as if you can’t breathe. Like you’re dying.

A panic attack.

Johnny leaps into action. He brings himself up to sit down on the couch besides him, holding onto his arm lightly. The boy stares forwards, clutching his chest. “Alec, hey,” He starts calmly, “Hey, hey. Look at me.” He gently uses two fingers to turn his head towards him.

Alec’s eyes are wild, panic coursing through the blue so visibly that it make’s Soap’s chest ache. This is the first time this has ever happened to him. It brings him back to when he was a kid who was watching Anna, his older sister and Alec’s mother, go through the same thing. Part of him feels guilty for this remembering this information. As if knowing would’ve somehow prevented this from happening, even if he knows it’s not true.

“Breathe with me, okay?” He instructs. Johnny breathes in deeply through his nose, watching Alec mimic the action to his best ability. Then, exhales through his mouth. The little boy copies the action. They continue to do this until they get his breathing under control. The four year old still has a hand grasping at his own chest, massaging circles into it every once in a while. “You alright?” Johnny checks in after a bit.

“I- I think so,” He stutters back, “What was that?”

“A panic attack,” He informs him, letting his hand hit the couch cushion as it falls away from his arm. It strikes again that life isn’t fair. The boy was so young and he deserved to be carefree but now he’s up at God knows what time after having his first panic attack due to a dream about his parents’ deaths.

“What’s that?”

“Well, it’s something your mommy used to get,” He explains, “Me too. I still get them. They can be very scary, I know. It usually happens when you get really overwhelmed about something and sometimes, it’s hard to figure out what caused it. Sometimes it’s nothing at all.

They're common and they don't last forever, even if they feel like they might at the moment."

"Will it happen again?" He asks, voice cracking. And isn't that the kicker? Johnny wishes that he could confidently tell him no. That it will never happen again. But that's not the case. It could. Lying to him about that seems wrong and not like the correct thing to do at all.

"I-I don't know, bud," He tells him honestly, "We're going to talk to Ms. Hannah about it next time we see her, alright?"

Alec nods at that. He leans into Soap's side to which the adult responds by wrapping his arms around the boy and holding him. His mind wanders. They all had been doing so well recently and Johnny had selfishly had hoped that the healing from the tragedy had finally passed. Yet, he knows it's not true.

He still has moments where he cries about his sister. So do the kids. Usually, they're able to get past it with happy memories rather than sad. But as Dr. Gerber would say, healing isn't linear and oftentimes will throw you new curveballs that you'll have to pick yourself up from all over again. This is just an example of it. He doesn't know if this is something that Alec had gotten from his mother or if it was due to the nightmare he had.

All he knows is that it happened. And he'll take the proper steps to ensure that even if this is something that he'll experience for a while, he'll have the support that he needs. Johnny won't get too deep into his own head about it. Alec needs him. Needs all of their support. He will get that. Soap will make sure of that.

"Dad?" Alec murmurs.

He hums in response. The building plans for the deck were long forgotten about, at this moment all that mattered was making sure his son was okay. Those could wait. Alec then requests, "Can you sing me a song? A good one. One that makes you feel better."

He thinks heavily on that. A song that makes him feel better. He closes his eyes, raking through his memory for anything with meaning. The sound of piano takes over the thoughts. His mother pressing onto the cords softly while his dad sits next to her, singing along to the melody she played

All three MacTavish kids listened, sitting together on the ground with wide eyes filled with wonder and hands entangled in each others.

Johnny smiles. He pushes back Alec's hair as he opens his eyes and starts to softly sing into his scalp, *"Slow down, you crazy child."*

Upon hearing this, Riley wakes up from his dog bed and jumps up onto the couch. He nuzzles himself into Alec's arms as if he can sense the little boy's distress and licks his face. The child giggles. The puppy settles down before laying against his chest as Alec hugs him. *"You're so ambitious for a juvenile. But then if you're so smart tell me, why are you still so afraid?"*

Johnny wouldn't say his voice is anything like his father's, not as practiced or precise with notes. But still, he tries his best. He moves so that his chin is now resting on the boy's head. *"Where's the fire, what's the hurry about? You better cool it off before you burn it out. You got so much to do and only. So many hours in a day."*

He hears someone coming down the stairs and registers the footsteps as Simon's before he even turns the corner. When he does, he narrows his eyes in confusion at the scene in front of him. His face is puffy from sleep and both his hair along with his clothes are slightly disheveled. Alec waves. It's a small gesture, hardly could even be considered as one but the blond reciprocates the action. *"But you know that when the truth is told,"* Johnny continues, *"That you can get what you want or you can just get old."*

While he's doing so, he gestures for Simon to join them on the couch. The man does, sitting behind his partner and pressing his chest onto his back, bringing an arm around to run his hand through Alec's hair. *"When will you realize, Vienna waits for you? Slow down, you're doing fine..."*

He continues to sing the song, feeling Alec slowly grow slack in his arms. Simon patiently waits besides him, allowing Johnny to continue until the child eventually falls back asleep.

"... When will you realize, Vienna waits for you?" He finishes, sneaking a glance at Alec. Sure enough, his eyes were shut and his breathing has slowed to a relax pace.

"That was beautiful, Johnny," Simon says from behind him.

"Oh, haud yer wheesht," Johnny hisses back, careful to make sure that there was no actual venom laced in his tone. He feels the blond chuckle silently. The hand from Alec's hair comes up, grabbing his chin to shake it slightly while the Scot resists the urge to slap it away un fear of waking up the boy.

When Simon speaks again, his voice is gruff with exhaustion, "I'm serious, love. What was that all about though?"

Johnny looks down at the sleeping figure, anxiety deep in his chest at the memory of what had just occurred. He turns his head to the blond slightly, not breaking his vision away from the kid in his arms. "He had a panic attack," He whispers.

The man tenses up behind him. All humor seems to be sucked from the air at those five little words instead a seriousness taking place. None of the children had ever gone through that. Sure, it's not like the two were any strangers to anxiety attacks or anything since they had been soldiers. They've seen them before. They've each had their own.

It doesn't make it any easier when it's your kid.

"Is he alright?" Simon questions.

"Aye. I calmed him down. The game plan is to talk to his therapist about it on Wednesday and see what she thinks. Anna did have a history of anxiety herself so I really don't want to take any risks or just try to move on from it like it was a once and done thing. Wouldn't want to do that anyways but," He relays to his partner. He feels more than sees the nod in confirmation behind him.

The former lieutenant then says, "Good plan."

They sit there with Alec until they both eventually fall asleep on the couch themselves. No more words pass between them since they had no interest in waking up the poor boy after the night he had just had. They also had no interest in leaving him, either.

Chapter End Notes

Idk why but Vienna feels like a song that Johnny would sing to his kids. Like it feels like a song he'd know. And it also for some reason feels like a song that Alec would adore. Btw this is important later on.

Alec's panic attack is based off of my own that I've had. Please let me know if you feel like it's misrepresented in any way. I'm always looking to improve.

I hope I did alright tonight writing wise and I hope you guys enjoyed the chapter despite the angst. Enjoy the sad food

Rumors, Tantrums, and Sparring

Chapter Summary

Alejandro and Rudy find out about Soap and Ghost in the worst way possible.

Sophie gets mad because Simon won't let her die (as do all babies at one point let's be real.) Simon and Johnny discuss the marriage topic a bit more. Gaz and Callie also find out in the worst way possible

Chapter Notes

I think after this I'll take a couple days to myself to reset my brain!! need a moment to do so :) love you guys so much thank you

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

A month later

“Did you hear?”

“Hear about what?”

“Mate, he settled down with someone and has three bloody kids now.”

“You're taking the piss,” The recruit exclaims, “There's absolutely no way.”

Alejandro walks by the group of recruits, placing a hand onto Rudy's chest and turning them in a position to where it seems like they're speaking to one another. The other man gives him an annoyed glare. He shoots a large, shit-eating smirk back at his boyfriend. Admittedly, he loves gossip.

How could you not? It was one of the many things that helped time pass on missions that seemed to bore on and were particularly grueling. Plus, Rudy may be acting as if it's a hassle right now but later on they'll be discussing it and giggling like schoolboys at the rumors. Soap and Gaz too.

He'd missed his friends. The two were overjoyed upon hearing that Price was requesting their help with a mission, excited to see their

people again. It's been a bit since they had even contacted each other due to how long it has taken to completely rebuild Las Almas after the mess that Graves had left them. It'd be nice to catch up.

"No, I'm not. Three kids," The recruit informs, "Three." Another one scoffs at that. Why was it so unbelievable that whoever this man is happened to have children now? Alejandro thinks that's quite rude.

He decides to name each of the recruits after numbers in his head to make it easier to keep track of the conversation flowing between them. One being the first, Two being the one that doesn't believe it, and Three being the recruit who hasn't even said a word yet. "Wait," Three finally cuts in, "Three kids— Isn't that the same amount that the sergeant had left the force to take care of? His sister died or something? Two girls, one boy... Yeah? It was three."

There's a heavy silence between all of them and Rudy pinches his eyebrows together, leaning slightly closer to listen in case they're talking too lowly to hear. The tension could cut through glass. They could practically feel the awkwardness from where they stood, along with an underlying aura of complete and total bewilderment. One then adds on, "The one that he was super close with?"

"Yeah. Loud mouth, stupid haircut?"

That description causes Ale and Rudy to make eye contact, both staring back at each other with matching expressions of disbelief. That sounds strangely Soap. No, exactly like Soap.

Now that he's thinking about it, it is sort of strange that the Scottish man hadn't been on the tarmac ready to greet them with big smiles and tight hugs. He didn't seem like the type to not welcome people. Plus, they had all formed a certain type of camaraderie after the mess of their last mission together, an unbreakable trust deep between them.

"Oh," Two says, "Was wondering what happened to that bloke. Just disappeared one day. Glad to hear he's not dead."

"Wait, so you think that those two settled down together?" One asks Three.

Three responds simply, "I mean if your questionable intel is solid then yeah. I do. Is it really that hard to believe? I mean there's been rumors about them being a couple on this base for God knows how long. But again, your intel does seem questionable. Hard to see that man as a

father.”

There’s a sound of a lighter flicking behind them. Smoke carries over from them into the space between the two visitors causing Rudy to crinkle up his nose in disgust.

“Well, underneath that mask is a man right? Just a regular old man,” One supplies, “Scary, sure. But a man all the same. And it came from Price himself. Kind of. Rogers had been in his office for something and he had left his phone on. On the screen there had been a text thread with a contact named Ghost along with a picture of three kids being sent from said contact. Kind of damning.”

Now Alejandro and Rudy were really staring at each other in complete shock. The name “Ghost” had been clear as day and if they were talking about the sergeant they thought they had been talking about earlier, that means it had to be Soap. Ghost and Soap. Settled down with three kids. Fucking unbelievable. Just a few moments ago, he had been really judgmental towards these men for how they were sort of being assholes about some poor man’s family. He still feels the same.

Although he understands the disbelief now, he can’t help but feel a surge of protectiveness wash over his body and course through his veins. If that was true, it was certainly none of their business. Ghost is a private man. He appreciates nothing more than that. So to have it breached by some big head nosy recruit that can’t keep his eyes off of his captain’s phone? It’s infuriating to say the least. He goes to act on this anger, but Rudy grabs his shoulder before he can even move.

He sends him that look. The one that says wait. Not stop. Wait.

“So did the kids look like MacTavish? I mean they’re his sister’s so they probably look like her, right? Which means they may look like him,” Two questions. He hears the sound of fabric against the tactical vest probably due to a shrugging motion.

“How would I know? I’m not the one looking through other people’s phones.”

Three snaps then, “But you are the one spreading it. Don’t act so morally correct now. We all know that you’re thriving off of this and know the answer so why don’t you save us the bulls it and just spit it out?” Even with the angry tone, One lets out a huff of amusement.

“Yes,” He then concedes, “He may have mentioned that they hold a

strong resemblance to Sergeant MacTavish. So what do we think, boys? Satisfied with that ending to the ‘are they or are they not fuckin’?’ million dollar question?” One says, sounding way too proud of himself. The hand on Ale’s shoulder let’s go and the colonel whips around as soon as he’s free, stomping over to the men.

They’re definitely lower on the ranks. Which, makes sense considering that they’re not out doing anything and instead sitting here gossiping about their superior officers. “You know what I think, pandejo?” Alejandro interrupts once close enough.

All three men pale at the sight of the way he’s angrily making his way to them, no doubt a figurative cloud of stormy darkness around him as his boots hit against the pavement. “I think that you keep your mouths shut,” He finishes, venom leaking from his tone as he does so, “And respect your superior officer’s, whether present or former’s, privacy. If he were here right now, I don’t think you’d be so brave.”

One lifts up his hands in surrender, eyes wide and limbs practically shaking. “Just some harmless gossip,” He defends.

“Don’t think it’s too harmless when you’re talking about an infamous man’s, who’s most likely wanted by hostiles, children. Not only just his but the sergeant’s as well,” Alejandro argue, running his eyes along all three men. He hadn’t even thought about it that way until the words came out of his mouth. Let Shepherd or someone else that Soap and Ghost pissed off know that the two have children together. It won’t end pretty.

A new fury makes home in his body at that that realization. All for what? Points on base? Reputation? Too stupid of reasons to put a while family’s life at risk. He leans in closer, growling, “Did you ever stop to think, cabrón, that you’re big mouth could get three innocent children killed if it is true? You don’t think anyone wants to bring harm to the Ghost? To Soap? Theres a reason this was kept from you.”

“So it’s true?”

That answer. It fuels that rage. How could he had just heard everything that has come from Alejandro’s mouth and ask that. So it’s true? The other two recruits make eye contact with each other before guiltily staring at the ground in attempt to avoid the colonels gaze.

“That’s all you have to say?” Alejandro yells, voice booming, ““So it’s true?””

One has the decency to flinch at that. There has been times when he's been known to lose his cool and it's about to be another one of those. He grabs the vest, pulling the man close enough to where he could read the name. Harris. "Names," He demands from the other two.

"Aarons," Two responds back immediately.

"Clarke," Three follows suit. He lets go of Harris, pushing him back aggressively as he does so. Alejandro likes gossip. Just not when it includes the anonymity of ex secret taskforce member's possible children.

"I don't know if it's true," He growls lowly to Harris, "But you better hope it's not because your captain will be hearing about this, cabrón. Rogers, Harris, Aarons, and Clarke. I'll remember those names."

He shoves past the group of men, making sure to shoulder check the main man with Rudy trailing behind him. He feels three pairs of eyes watch then go.

—

"Sophie!" Simon yells, chasing the the crawling little girl.

She giggles loudly at him before letting out a scream and moving faster up the stairs. Then, she starts to tilt backwards. His heart practically stops. The blond goes up two at a time before scooping her up off the ground before a disaster could occur with a relieved sigh. "Johnny!" he calls out.

Riley's running around him, barking at the chaos as if not exactly sure on what he's supposed to be doing but not liking it either way. He watches Johnny come in through the open sliding glass door that leads to out back, pencil tucked in his ear and dirt covering him. "Aye?" He asks.

"Think it's baby gate time. Bugger just took off on me and almost fell down the stairs," He grumbles. Johnny pinches his eyebrows together, walking fully into the kitchen and closing the door behind him. His boots clack against the tile as he does so.

"Alright," He nods, "We need more baby food anyways. Gaz and Callie want to come over with Adeline to see how the decks coming around after the kids get home from school, by the way. What do you want me to tell him?"

Simon responds, "Tell em' they're welcomed over, love." He leans forward and places a kiss on his boyfriend's lip before pulling back to make a dramatic disgusted face at the sweat on him. Soap furrows his eyebrows together. "You stink, Johnny. Go take a bloody shower before we go."

The shorter man smiles deviously at that, stepping towards Simon. He glares back. But of course, Johnny's never perturbed by that. "Do you want a hug, Si?"

"No."

"Why not?"

Simon is practically glowering at this point. "Johnny, I swear to God if you get me covered in dirt... Shower." The other man sighs, leaning into his boyfriend's space and placing a kiss onto his cheek before turning to head into the bathroom. That little gesture causes his features to soften.

Sophie wiggles in his arms again, trying to be free with a frustrated, "Da!"

"No, you can't be let down. Almost gave me a heart attack with that. Swear you're giving me grey hairs, kid," Simon tells her, readjusting her so that she doesn't fall out of his arms. Sophie slaps her hands in an up and down motion against his arm, letting out a loud scream at him. He flinches away from it. His eardrum practically rings after she's finished her mini tantrum. "You done?"

She starts kicking her feet. Not done. Not at all done. He sighs, continuing to hold her as she throws a whole fit about having to be in Simon's arms rather than him just letting her practically kill herself on the stairs. He makes his way to the entrance of the house to slip his shoes on. A moment later Johnny comes out of the other door that leads to bathroom in nothing but a towel around his waist.

Simon rakes his eyes up and down his torso shamelessly. He felt a bit warmer in temperature at the sight of the gorgeous man before him as water droplets run down his tanned chest. Johnny's lips fall into a cocky smirk at that as he lets out a snort of amusement and leaves the room to head upstairs to get dressed.

It's not until he's gone that he realizes that Sophie has finally stilled and is now staring at him incredulously. He does a double take at that before giving her the exact same look back. He lets out a defensive,

“What?”

She practically side eyes him. Is his daughter really judging him? Why does it feel like she's judging him? He shakes his head, grabbing the surgical mask that's hanging on the coat hanger and before he can even put it on his face, she snatches it from his hand.

She has made it her goal to terrorize him today. There's not other explanation. “Johnny, hurry up!” He calls out.

“Haud yer wheest!” A voice yells back, slightly muffled. Sophie throws his mask on the ground. He blinks at her, remaining patient with the baby for her little attitude after not getting what she wanted. Which was, again, to kill herself on the stairs apparently.

“You know,” He grunts as he bends down to grab the item, “Even though you're being the absolute worst right now, I still love you. I love you dearly. But your daddy needs to hurry up because I am getting very overwhelmed by your attitude right now and I would like for him to deal with it instead because I'm not very good at navigating these.” They stare at each other. At first he thinks that they had worked it out based on the calm look on her face. But then she attempts to rip the mask out of his hand again and when he doesn't let her this time, she starts wailing.

She's slapping at his arms again and trying to grab at the mask while he just let out a huff of air. Despite how frustrated he's beginning to feel at the situation he starts to bounce her up and down, making shushing noises as she does so. Keeping his voice calm. He tries everything. From distracting her, to trying to sing to her. Nothing.

Johnny comes down the stairs and sees the commotion as he furrows his eyebrows together yet again. “What happened?” He questions.

“I didn't let her kill herself on the stairs and then wouldn't let her throw my stuff on the ground,” Simon sighs. The Scot smiles and shakes his head, taking Sophie from his arms. As if magic, she stops.

They both blink at each other. “Huh,” Johnny mumbles, “Maybe she's just mad at you.”

“Yes because it's my fault I won't let her die,” Simon exasperates in a dejected but sarcastic tone. His boyfriend unhelpfully laughs at him before curling a fist into his shirt and pulling him down into a kiss. He feels his body relax immediately.

Something about Johnny is his lifeline. Anytime that their lips touch or their skin brushes against each other's, he feels his soul light afire but also simmer down into a steady buzz all at the same time. If he hadn't known any better, he'd say that John MacTavish was a God angst men. The beauty that he is and the graciousness that he holds is nothing but a sight to be seen.

When Simon eventually dies, he feels as if the last thing he'll remember is what it felt like for those lips to kiss along his skin, tying together his broken soul and healing the unhealable. The man that couldn't be saved.

Once detached, Johnny states smugly, "Or maybe I'm just better than you. Who knows?"

Simon takes back everything he just said. (Not really.)

They head to the store and get everything they need for the new chapter in Sophie's development. The two men had spent forever in the food aisle, trying to decide whether or not the baby liked mashed peas as they don't remember if they got it for her before. Some people call this parent brain. Simon's afraid it means that they're getting old.

Realistically speaking they aren't really. He's only 31 after all, about to be 32 pretty soon. Johnny had just turned 28. This is considered old only in military standards where men like Price are seen as ancient due to the fact that most don't make it past 25. They were considered the lucky ones— The ones who made it out.

Afterwards, they agreed to head to the park to just wait for the school to sit and let the summer breeze slowly turning into autumn blow over them. He grabs Johnny's hand, tracing his thumb along his ring finger in circles as if he could somehow measure it with just touch alone. His partner watched him. Sophie sat on the blanket, distracted by the new toy that they had gotten her while out as she slams it against the floor. Always doing stuff like that.

"Simon," Johnny whispers, "What are you doing?"

He doesn't respond with words, opting to hum instead. He takes in account of Johnny's tan skin while thinking about what ring color would look good against his skin tone. A gold would bring out the warmth. In all honesty, if he could marry this man tomorrow, he would. Devotion is one hell of a thing.

He knows that is impossible for them to get married with any legal founding due to his past and the fact that if he were to try to become no longer dead, it would bring back all of the heat of him being accused of his family's murder. He doesn't know if he can win that one. It doesn't matter how innocent he is, all of the evidence stacked against him is something that he doesn't even want to risk fighting. Especially not now that he has this. "When we get married," Simon starts, locking eyes with Johnny, "Are you okay with it not technically being legal? I don't want to take away anything from your life so if it's not—"

"Is there a good reason why you won't legally revive yourself?" Johnny cuts in, voice steady. Simon exhales through his nose before hesitantly nodding. "Then I'm fine with it, Si. I trust your decisions. One day I'd like to know the story behind that but for now I'm alright. I do want to know more about the man I hope to marry one day."

"That you are marrying one day," Simon corrects, tugging down the mask and pulling him closer by his wrist to give him a chaste, brief kiss. Afterwards, he puts the fabric back in place.

They sit in a peaceful silence, watching the life go by in the town. People shuffling in and out of shops or cafes, sometimes with their own young children and other times with a lover. Every once in a while, a teen would pass by with some friends as they laughed loudly to one another, obviously skipping school.

None of this scares Simon like it used to. The idea of sitting out in a park just to people watch in order to pass the time used to be something that he'd rather not do. But there's a new tranquility to it. Especially with Johnny and Sophie by his side, observing with him. He thinks about all of the kids. Leah, Alec... How they seemed to be genuinely distressed that he wasn't a MacTavish like them.

In disturbance of the silence, Simon blurts, "I'm going to take your last name." Johnny faces his attention onto him, eyes wide as he does so. His mouth opens and closes repeatedly in an attempt to argue. "It's the name that belongs to all of the people I love. It's the name that the kids carry. Riley is tainted with a horrible past and I'd like to finally allow myself to be free of the burden that it brings with it.

"I wouldn't have to be Simon 'Ghost' Riley anymore. The dangerous lieutenant that everyone whispers about as if I was some myth. I can just be Simon MacTavish— Father and husband. That's all I want. Besides, if we do that, it doesn't attract any attention our way. Doesn't

put our family in danger.”

Johnny takes a moment to look at him. To really look at him. To take in all of the words he was saying as particularly strong gust of wind brushes over them. It blows through the brunet’s hair, whirling it around. Simon thinks that it solidifies his decision. The beauty that is his partner is something that he’d like to bring with him everywhere he goes. Tattooing it on his ribs where it could be kept safe.

Devotion is a hell of a thing.

Then he says, “I’d like that, Si.” His face was so unbelievably soft as the words came from his mouth. They exchange another kiss and watch the world go by around them again, happy to be a part of it.

“Be careful!” Callie scolds. The shuffling of feet against dirt fills Johnny’s ears as him and Gaz grab at each other. After showing him how building the deck had been going, he had gotten this devilish look in his eye that has always only screamed trouble in their times as sergeants together.

Gaz had shucked off his flannel, suggesting, “The ground looks pretty sturdy. What do you say?” And that was the end of any type of behaving in front of the children. Simon had laughed next to him at the time, shaking his head and holding out his hand for Soap to high five. Sophie watched from where she had sat in his lap before mimicking the action. He had gave them both one.

“Show me why you were my favorite, Sergeant,” Simon had said loud enough for Gaz to hear. The other stared dejectedly at them before scoffing and rolling his eyes playfully.

“Aye, Lt. I won’t let you down.”

So now there Gaz and Johnny were, sparring in the space where the deck was supposed to be being built while Callie anxiously holds Adeline in her hands and Simon and the kids egg him on. “Kick his ass, Dad!” Leah cheers.

“Leah...” Simon scolds, disbelief on his face as he looks at the little girl. She sinks in on herself while laughing awkwardly.

“Sorry, Daddy.”

The blond doesn't say anything else at that moment as he glances at her once. Twice. Then smirks at her and calls out, "Kick his ass, Johnny!" Alec giggles at that. With the cheers and the praise, Soap manages to get the upper hand as Gaz throws a punch his way. The Scot dodges, ducking away and slamming his upper body into the other man's torso, causing them to slam against the ground with a thump.

He could practically feel Callie's flinch. But this was normal for them. They used to do this type of stuff every day for a living and the pain was minimum, hardly even noticeable. Gaz starts to try to maneuver his way out from underneath Johnny but it's too late. The older man had gotten control of the situation and had managed pin him on his stomach, using his weight to keep him down via two knees. One on his back, one on his legs, and his wrists in a tight grip in his hands. "Fuckin," Gaz curses, wiggling around.

Soap lets him go, standing and holding out his hand with an easy smile on his face. "Better luck next time," he chuckles. His best friend groans, reaching out and taking the offered limp before allowing himself to be hauled up.

"My turn," A gruff voice says. It causes chills to go up Johnny's spine. He turns to see Simon stalking his way over to him, eyes gleaming with a dark look as he cracks his knuckles. It's incredibly hot. Gaz whistles, patting him on the back before making his way over to his girlfriend and sitting alongside her. The kids practically start buzzing with excitement as Alec and Leah start whispering to each other who they were going to root for.

Simon pulls off his hoodie and throws it to the side to reveal the tight tank that he had been wearing underneath. Johnny could swoon. He then gets into a ready stance. It's a reflection of all of the times they had sparred together in the past back before either have them had acted on their feelings. Back when Ghost used to wear a mask. Johnny leans down slightly, tilting his head and smirking, "Missed this view."

"Keep it tactical, Johnny," Simon huffs, focused.

Johnny chuckles lowly, "I'll try, sir." And try he will. There's something beautiful about the blond in this state. His arms out on full display, muscles moving under skin and tattoos sleeves while his hair falls into his face. He's cut it recently. So it's back to it's original short length, much to Soap's dismay. However, he's still a beautiful man.

“Watch this,” Gaz mumbles into Callie’s ear, “They don’t ever spar in a way that’s normal. Never have. It’s like a weird flirtatious dance for them. Like birds.”

Callie laughs loudly at that, Adeline jumping at the sudden noise from her mother. Soap grumbles to himself that’s too low for anyone to hear except for him and it had certainly been some pretty colorful choice words that the kids do not need to hear.

Once they start, they are indeed just toying around with each other for a moment. This used to be their only excuse to disappear into their own world together so they had wordlessly created a habit of not taking it totally seriously. Price had called them out on it multiple times. Gaz loved to tease Soap about it. But Johnny was just happy to get any of Ghost’s attention at all.

“Told you,” He registered Gaz whispering. After that, Johnny decided to take it a bit more serious. In all honesty, he always loses to his former lieutenant but he never stopped putting up his best fight anyways. There’s a lot of dodging. A lot of attempted pinning. The children remained quiet, watching their fathers in amazement.

But of course, Simon remains victorious. He has Johnny pinned in a straddling position, legs squeezing his thighs so that he can’t move them and wrists in a tight grip. He has a smug smirk on his face. Soap wonders if he had done that way back when every other time they had fought in the past and if he would survive knowing the answer to that. His chest heaves with effort and parts of his blond strands stick to his forehead from the sweat. Again, he looks gorgeous. “You did well that time,” the man compliments, “Almost got me down once or twice.”

Johnny scoffs back, “Sure. Let me up, ye big loaf.” Simon then gets up, not even waiting a second before pulling him up onto his feet again.

“Still a sore loser?” He asks.

Yes. The answer is always yes. Which, his partner seems to know if the pleased expression on his face is anything to go by. The taller man shakes his head before grabbing his chin and pressing his lips onto his as a way to make him feel better. Of course, it does. Johnny wants that to annoy him but instead, he melts into the kiss and tries to chase him when he’s backing out of it way too soon.

Two shocked people gawk at them. Callie and Gaz’s mouth’s are wide open but there’s a slight smile at the corners of them as they both dart their eyes back and forth between the two men in front of them.

Simon and Johnny blink. "What?" Soap interrogates.

"Uh," Gaz coughs, "Did you forget to tell me something, mate?"

The realization dawns on Johnny then as he dramatically slaps his hand against his forehead. He never told Gaz. There's a slight unease churning in his stomach as the guilt settles in until he's reminded of the woman sitting next to his best friend. The one he once had no idea about. "Oh, so you can keep your relationship a secret but I can't?" He chides, placing his hands on his hips as he does so.

Gaz points at him, arguing, "This is different and you know it!"

"Because we're both men?" Soap jokes, trying to get him to stumble over his words. Simon, knowing this, groans next to him and pinches the bridge of his nose while Leah and Alec watch the exchange going on in amusement, by far used to their bickering by now.

"Did you just—" He sputters out, "Did you just 'Is it cause I'm gay?' Me? Mate, I know that you're well aware that I'm fucking bi."

Simon cuts in, warning in his tone, "Garrick—"

"Sorry, Si. Sorry, Sophie, don't repeat that word," He turns his attention to the eight month year old who just looks up from her toys to blow a raspberry at him in response. His expression goes blank. After a moment of processing, he shrugs, jutting out his bottom lip in acceptance of that answer.

Johnny just crosses his arms. He did know that. They've talked about that on multiple occasions and bonded over it. So really, a stupid move. Still, caused him to take a moment to stammer regardless so did he really lose that one?

Gaz then whips back around to Soap, clarifying loudly, "So you know it's not 'cause you're gay it's because I've been waiting for you two to get your heads of out your asses for almost two years now. Two bleeding years! How long have you been officially together?"

Simon and Johnny look at each other, not at all phased by the distressed. They have a conversation with their eyes, trying to mentally figure out what day it had technically been since they didn't really discuss anything until the day after. Once a conclusion is come up with, the taller of the two answers simply, "Johnny's birthday."

"Does Price know?"

“Of course,” Simon retorts, looking slightly offended, “I told him right away.”

Gaz makes a dramatic hand gesture towards the blond, angry eyes the size of golfballs as he glares at the Scot. Johnny sighs, snaking a limb around Simon’s waist and ducking underneath his armpit so that he would have an arm around him. He quickly understands and reciprocate. “I still technically consider it revenge for you never telling me that you were in a relationship. We’ll call it even,” He debates.

Their friend taps his foot, darting his brown orbs between the two as his teeth worry on his lower lip. Callie, Leah, and Alec all seem to metaphorically lean forwards in their seat as they wait for his response. “Aw, for Christ’s sake,” Gaz grumbles, standing and throwing his arms up, “Congratulations, you guys.”

He wraps them both in their own brief hugs followed by Callie doing the same. They’re careful not to squish the baby when she does, however so it was really only one armed embraces. Leah skips over, exclaiming, “They’re going to get married!”

“What?” Callie cries out, adjusting Adeline again. Gaz then has the fury of a thousand men aimed at Johnny as he grabs at his hand, scanning over the fingers for any rings before trying to do the same to Simon. He backs out after receiving a glare.

“We’re not getting married yet,” Simon informs them, his boyfriend nodding along.

“Right,” Soap adds on, “Leah just wants us to.”

Leah crosses her arms, huffing out a breath of frustration at them before walking away to sit down next to Sophie once away. Callie laughs, “At least you know she supports it.”

“You better tell me when one of you propose. Because I know the both of you and know it’s a lot closer than all of us think it is,” Gaz says, pointing at them once again.

“Don’t worry, Gaz,” Simon soothes, “You’ll know.”

Chapter End Notes

(NO ONES COMING TO HURT THE KIDS THEYLL BE ALRIGHT
AUTHOR IS NOT FORESHADOWING)

Alec's panic attack storyline will be coming back soon. Also some Simon angst next chapter so you have been warned

Also you guys should read dream a little dream by angelicasdean. It's so good and that author deserves so much appreciation. Johnny being Joseph's daycare teacher is just *chefs kiss*

Triggers and Road Trips

Chapter Summary

Tw for this chapter: slightly vulgar language(no slurs I promise just soap being an angry boy), ptsd flashbacks, paranoia, disassociation (for this one, I will put * before and *** after to let you know it's safe if descriptions of disassociate can cause you to fall into an episode as well since I know that's a thing and I fell slightly into one while writing it 😊😊😊)**

Simon gets a call from Price about the people on base gossiping his family.

Chapter Notes

The break was nice and I feel like I came back with stronger writing. Thank you all for the nice comments :) I will be responding to them all later. I'm feeling okay with this story again and my writing and will keep it going for as long as I feel like it god dammit 🤖🤖🤖

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The call came in at 2:25 in the morning.

"Simon, I'm sorry..."

He really hadn't blamed Price at all. It's not his fault that some rookies couldn't keep their eyes off of his phone and he had assured that to the old man. It didn't stop that cold grip in his chest as soon as the phone had hung up or the way everything around him had started to tilt and whirl. Tears pricked at the corner of his eyes as those claws around his chest, his lungs, his stomach clutched harder. He hadn't even realized the ragged breathing was coming from him.

Rationally a part of his brain knew that just because others had found out doesn't mean that his children or Johnny were particularly in any type of danger; just that they could be. That was enough. Flashes of Christmas lights had appeared in his vision along with the coppery smell of blood in his nose. He shook it away. While doing so, his eyes had fallen onto the sleeping form of his boyfriend, his best friend, his Johnny.

Still just as gorgeous as always. Mouth agape, hair tussled around, and eyes shut in perfect peace. Simon had to place two fingers on his pulse point to make sure that he was still here, satisfied by the thumping beneath them. He lets out a breath of relief. Then, turns the fingers into a cup on his cheek as the panic in him turns into a wave of protectiveness, pushing and clawing to make its way to the surface. He turns his attention onto the closet. Then back to Johnny. Slowly, careful not to wake him, he rises.

He pulls open the closet, running his fingers along the wall that's secretly a false backing. Just because they retired, doesn't mean they didn't still expect to protect themselves but this was only meant for emergencies. The real deal. Even though realistically Simon knew that no one was coming, he still fully believed that they were lurking in the night outside the house as they waited for their chance to strike. He pulled his fingers away from the walls as if it burned him.

His brain was clouded as he made his way to the first child's room, making sure that they were just sleeping rather than something far worse. A toy plane. Blood. He clutched at his chest, trying to calm the panic. Thoughts swirled around his brain. Things like: It's going to happen again or It already happened while he slept.

Was Johnny still alive? Did he check?

Yes, he did. Simon leans himself against the wall, looking out at the window at the end of the upstairs hall as he begged himself to just compartmentalize a little bit. Just a little. Not to go full Ghost like his brain is screaming at him to do but to just try to push it all down a bit to allow him to check on the kids. He lets out a steady breath through his nostrils.

Simon opens the door to Leah's room. Everything's as it should be. The nightlight shines in the corner, illuminating the pink walls that contained decorations and pictures. Toys on the floor that she had been playing with earlier. That dollhouse that her and Alec loved to play with so much neatly put together, not a single flaw in place just as she usually keeps it. There is no blood. No metallic smell. He steps deeper into the room until he's over her sleeping form, her looking just as peaceful as Johnny had two seconds ago. He places two fingers on her wrist. Alive. The relief he feels is unlike any other he's ever felt in his life.

He moves onto Alec's room. No blood. Just blue and green decor with the white walls that the whole house used to have. When they painted

Leah's room from purple to pink they had asked him if he wanted a color change for his but he had told them no. The little boy sleeps a little less peaceful then his father and his sister, instead with the covers bunched in heaps on half of his body, leg hanging off the bed. The sight would usually make Simon laugh. But he's too scared to. He steps forwards, repeating just as he had done to Leah before.

Alive. He lets out a shaky breath, grabbing Alec's limb and placing back on the bed before fixing the blanket again. It would be back the way it had been when he walked in in less than an hour. Restless sleeper. He leaves the room.

Simon stands in front of Sophie's door, hesitating. His eyes remained locked on the doorknob, unable to move. She's so young. The others are too but she's not even a year old yet. He takes a deep breath and opens the door. The room had changed a lot since they he had first moved in. There was still the same old butterfly decor but the bassinet had turned into a crib by now as she got older and while the rocking chair was still there, it was hardly in use anymore. There was a new toy box in it, just as the other children had. But there was no metallic smell in the air. He makes his way over to the crib, looking in to see the sleeping 8 month old letting out light snores.

The man leaves the room, making his way back out to hall where he immediately collapses and lets the relief come to him full force. He grips his hands on the fence around the staircase, letting his tears fall freely as his brain comes to realize that it hasn't happened again.

After a while, he takes one last deep breath and lets it out. The protectiveness in him turning into sheer determination as he makes his way back into his and Johnny's room, glancing over at him before taking the false wall off the closet to grab a gun and some knives to place on his person. Once he gets to the balaclava is when he hesitates again. Outstretched hand turning into a clenched fist.

If he goes Ghost, what would happen?

"Simon, I'm sorry..." The smell of death. His brother. Beth. His mom. Joseph.

He wouldn't be able to protect them if he doesn't. Simon snatches the balaclava up and pulls it over his head before making his way downstairs. He triple checks all entrances to the house. Pulling on the baseball bat that keeps the sliding glass door to outback from opening, testing the lock on the windows, making sure the front door is locked.

All of it.

Then he settles on the window seat in the living room, eyes scanning the night with the gun firmly in his grip as he keeps watch.

Johnny wakes up to an empty bed and immediately something strikes him as not right. The door to the closet was open. He was sure that they closed it before they had gone to sleep just as they always have. He blinks sleep from his eyes as he stands.

Maybe Simon had a nightmare and was sitting downstairs with a cup of tea to soothe away the images, as he usually does. Soap lets out a yawn, making his way downstairs and turning his gaze to the kitchen as he does so. He freezes. There was no Simon. He's fully awake now, slightly alerted about where his boyfriend could possibly be at 4 am on a Friday night— Technically Saturday morning.

But then he turns the archway. His feet come to a slow stop upon the sight. Ghost sat in the window seat, eyes trained on the outside world with a gun placed in his hands and Johnny is left wondering if the past eight months of his life had all been some wild dream that he had. The little shoes in the doorway told him otherwise. His gut churns in concern. "Si?" He croaks out.

"Go back to bed, Johnny," Ghost responds, tough. The tone was familiar but it only made him even more worried about the man.

He pads his way over to the man, placing a tentative hand on his arm. "Mo leannan," He starts gently, "What's going on?"

"They know."

He screws his face up into one of confusion at that, moving to sit next to Ghost. The other man doesn't remove his hard gaze from the outside but does readjust his limbs to make space for his partner. "Who knows? What do they know?" Johnny whispers.

He does finally look at him, his brown eyes filled with so much terror and desperation. They were glassy, bloodshot as if he had been crying. Immediately, Johnny feels his own sense of danger rippling up his spine but not due to whatever Simon thinks is out there. But for Simon. Not fear of him. Fear of what's terrorizing him at this very moment.

"People on base found out about us and the kids via Price's phone," He explains, "Got a call from him not too long ago. They've been gossiping about it. The wrong people could find out like that and then..."

He swallows, turning his gaze back onto the night. Johnny lets the words mull over his brain. While Simon is right, he's sure that Price and Laswell are working double time to ensure that that doesn't happen and he trusts them. He knows the man in front of him does too. So something deeper is going on, deeper than he can even imagine based off of the fear in those brown pools. "Go to bed, Johnny."

Johnny was not going back to bed. Even if there was something out there, that would be the last thing that he'd do. They were a team, always have been. But Simon seems to be in a mode where he reverting back into being Ghost, scared of something out there. Running. Maybe Soap just needs to catch up. "Alright," He responds, "You take first watch, I take second."

Ghost whips his head around, staring at him with wide eyes. Now, he's wearing the balaclava but the Scot is fairly confident that he hasn't suddenly lost the ability to read him even with his whole face covered. If he had to guess, his features were in an expression of complete shock. Johnny nods, saying, "No one fights alone, aye, Lt?"

And it's true. He wouldn't let Simon fight alone; whether the threat was real or not. Trying to convince him that it wasn't would only make the situation worse, he's sure. Ghost would push him further and further away from the situation in some attempt to protect him but if Johnny remained just as patient, just as understanding as he always had been by showing that he's not alone rather than trying to convince him that he's paranoid for no reason; maybe it'll help him open up. Tell him what's really going on.

Johnny lays down, placing his head on Ghost's lap. He feels the man tense as if it was the first he's ever touched him in any type of way. After a bit, he relaxes. A gloved hand slowly reaches down, running through the messy hair on the shorter man's head.

He doesn't know how long they sit like that for. Could've been minutes, could've been hours. But he doesn't care that his legs are starting to cramp up from being in that weird position or that his eyes are starting to droop with tiredness right now. Simon needs him. He'll be there.

"I can't lose you. Any of you," a broken voice says. Johnny slowly sits up again, locking eyes with the source of it. "I can't do that again. I won't, Johnny. Not this time."

He softly prods, "Again?"

Ghost lets out a shaky breath, squeezing his eyes shut as his grip around the gun tightens. A single tear falls from his eye. The brunet reaches forwards, wiping it away with his thumb before splaying his hand on his cheek causing the other to lean into the touch. He opens his eyes again, hissing, "My family is dead because of me. They were murdered because of me. All of them."

Johnny's heart breaks slowly but surely as Simon tells him everything. From Roba, to coming home and finding his family. All the things in between. How he got framed for the crime and why he's legally dead. Everything.

There's a certain pain that comes from hearing your lover's painful backstory along with an unexplainable anger at the world for doing that to them. Simon never deserved any of this. If he was smart enough, he'd go back in time and prevent it all from happening somehow with no care in the world on whether or not it effected them meeting some day. He'd take this pain if he could.

Simon finishes with, "I can't let it happen to you. To them. I won't. If I don't do something to prevent it Johnny, I'll lose my mind."

His voice is so... small. It's a huge contrast to the way it had sounded when he had first come downstairs to check on him. Johnny nods again. He brings his other hand up, now having a firm hold on his face, he brings him forwards to place a long, gently kiss on his forehead through the balaclava. He feels his own tear slip from his eye.

The sadness in his chest was deep. A want to fix but knowing that there will never be anything he can do to fully take away the pain of his past. But he'll heal him as best as he can. If that means supporting him through this, he'll do it no questions asked. He would've anyways. But especially now.

A new understanding had come onto him. Why it took so long for him to get close to Ghost and why he had run when Johnny had to leave the service. A fear of loving. A fear of losing. He's sure Simon's worst nightmare had just come to life, haunting his brain with the past being mixed into the present. Part of him wants to be mad at Price for

telling him but that's just his own overprotectiveness speaking. It makes sense on why the captain would.

If it hadn't been Simon, he would've called Johnny and he would've told him anyways. No matter what, they were going to end up in this exact situation at some point since it was hard to keep this a secret forever. He's sort of glad it happened while Price was still Captain as he wouldn't of trusted anyone else to do the job right and protect their family from any outside forces. Maybe... a little help in the endeavor wouldn't hurt.

He felt his own anger at those rookies anyways. Along with his own fear,

"Alright," Johnny soothes, "How about this? We can't have you sitting here every night with a gun and a mask looking outside as if there's some danger. While I understand totally, we both know that will scare the kids. But, maybe we could go down to base? See what Price and Laswell are doing to make this go away for ourselves? The kids can stay with my parents—"

"They stay with us," Simon interrupts. He blinks at his boyfriend, shock evident on his own features. Wouldn't that only confirm the rumors to be true?

"Simon, if they come with us everyone will know that it's the truth," he explains slowly.

The former lieutenant sighs, looking at him with that bored stare that he does whenever Soap says something particularly unwise. Which, he's confused on this one. He thought that made total sense. "The second we step foot on that base, they'll know it's the truth, Johnny. I'd rather have the kids with us. In our sights and behind the protected walls of a base."

He supposes that's true. It's not everyday that two past military members come onto base after some gossip about them has spread. Plus, this is about Simon. If he needs them all to be in his sight then they'll do that.

While the kids were asleep, they start packing some suitcases for them and themselves. Johnny had called Price a while ago and explained the situation to him in which he told them he understood, easily granting them all access onto base. It had helped that he knew the

little ones are coming. Laswell had also apparently swayed his decision upon hearing that she finally could have a chance to meet the monsters.

The packed up the car. Then, walked into the house to tell the kids that they were going on a road trip.

"Play the Vienna song!" Alec demanded, clapping his hands. Simon laughed, turning in his seat to look at the child with a raised eyebrow as he smiled innocently at him. The blond played the song.

Ever since they had come up with this plan, Johnny had watched his boyfriend slowly calm down and come back to himself with a new ease. He still seemed tense. His smile didn't quite meet his eyes and his laughs were a little shyder than usual. Leah could sense the shift. There had been a moment where her eyes met Johnny's in the rearview mirror and she looked as if she was about to say something before he slowly shook his head.

They had left pretty early in the morning, hoping to get there by the afternoon. On the way they stopped for breakfast, allowing the kids to enjoy their meal and take bathroom breaks before heading back onto the road. Sophie was being a real champ, surprisingly. Not throwing any fits or crying about her gums too often.

Along the way the had sung to the radio, hoping to forget about the real reason why this trip was being taken.

Upon entering base, Simon had pulled the Ghost balaclava over his face again. It had confused all three children to see him that way but none of them had made any attempt to ask about it as the adults helped them out of the car. While they walked in, the silence was heavy. Leah rested on his shoulders; placing two hands on his chin to steady herself while Johnny held onto her ankle just in case, Sophie was propped on Simon's hip, and Alec was walking between his fathers with each of their hands in his own.

To say people stared was understatement. They kept their heads held high as they moved forwards, no one daring to say a word as Ghost sent deadly glares their way. A threat.

Price eventually met up with them in which Alec ran forwards,

yelling, "Grandpa Price!" Meanwhile, Leah fought to scramble off of Johnny's shoulders but he had already started to hold her and put her onto the ground. The both rush over to the man, tackling him in one big hug with the eldest daughter being a bit late to it. He made a show of squeezing them tightly as they giggled at his antics. People gawked.

After they pulled away from each other, he made his way over to the boys with a grim look on his face that screamed of nothing but sadness and guilt. That would wait though, since there's one more that didn't get to say her hello. Sophie did grabby hands at him. Simon let her go to him, eyes careful not to reveal any type of emotion as he did so. Sophie screams in delight at Price, flapping her arms happily while the older man flinches at the noise. She grabs at his mustache, pulling him forward to place a kiss on his cheek as both her fathers reach forwards, with a, "No, don't pull on his mustache."

Johnny grabs at her hand, prying her fingers from the grip that she had on the poor man's facial hair with a look of apology. After this Price laughs awkwardly. The air is thick with a tension that hadn't been there the last time they had all met up and as Soap steps back into his own space again, Simon wraps a comforting arm around his waist to try to ease it a bit. He doesn't know who that was for more.

Price comes forward, placing a hand on Simon's shoulder with a, "I really am sorry, boys."

"Not your fault," Johnny says loud enough for everyone watching to hear with a hard glare to the crowd. They all turn away quickly, acting as if they weren't watching to begin with.

The captain looks as if he's about to speak again when another angry voice cuts through the air, "Hey!"

Both Simon and Johnny turn to see Alejandro and Rudy making their way over to them. The kids stop running around Price like they just had been moments ago, paying full attention to the scene in front of them. As they get closer, Soap can see how absolutely pissed Ale looks. He tilts his head in confusion.

Once close enough, he pushes at both of their shoulders as he throws a slew of annoyed words, probably curses, at them in Spanish while Rudy just stands behind him quietly. Simon blinks. Johnny is desperately trying to keep up with what's being said, not entirely sure why they're being yelled at by their friend. Still happy to see him nonetheless. But then he gestures to the kids while speaking and it

clicks in the former sergeant's head as a small smile begins to form on his face.

They never told them about the kids. Or being together.

Once Al's done, he looks at them expectantly, eyebrows raised as he breathes heavily. They're silent. "Congratulations, you two," Rudy says and Soap nods curtly to him in thanks.

Once it's clear that the other man of the two is done, Johnny claps a hand on Al's shoulder a couple of times in a friendly manner. It causes Simon's grip around him to tighten a bit. The Scot then easily speaks, "Sorry, hermano."

Alejandro scoffs, looking over at the children who were staring at him with wide eyes. Well, all except Leah who was giving him that calculating scowl as she looked him up and down. It causes the colonel to laugh. "Can tell that one's Ghost's!" He exclaims.

That causes Simon to look at the children anxiously, swallowing. It pricks at Johnny's heart since he knows what it's like for him to be called that in front of the children and usually they'd correct it but not here. Not on base. Unease curls in his stomach. "Ah, yes," The blond mumbles, gesturing for the kids to come forwards as his limb slides off of his partner. They do.

Simon places a hand on each of their backs, pushing them slightly forwards and saying, "This is Leah and Alec." Both Al and Rudy lean down to their heights, the latter pulling something out of his pocket as they do so. The children's father tries to continues, "Leah, Alec, this is your—"

"Tíos!" Rudy declares, opening his palms to reveal two pieces of candy in them. The children look up at the parents for permission with hopeful glints in those blue eyes, barely concealed smiles on their faces.

Johnny chuckles, "Go on."

Both of them excitedly bounce on their heels, taking the sweets and opening them before plopping them into their mouths. Simon lets out a small huff of amusement. "What are tíos?" Leah asks, struggling to say the word correctly with her own Scottish accent.

Alejandro grins at her, all teeth. "Uncles," He informs her. She whips her attention onto her fathers with an accusing glare on her features.

"How many more aunts and uncles do we have?" She demands, causing both men to freeze up. Admittedly, they have introduced a lot of their friends to the kids as their aunts and uncles because they are more like family then anything, honestly. He's about open up his mouth to respond when—

"One more."

He looks up to see Laswell making her way over to the group, a smile on her face. Johnny stares at her in disbelief, mouth opening and closing until she comes up to them. She crosses her arms, "You gonna stand there are you going to introduce me?"

Soap snaps out of his stupor, informing the kids of who she is as she shakes their hands. He then introduces all three adults to the youngest Mactavish, Sophie, in which all of them immediately melt at the sight of her as she basks in all of the attention with a wide grin on her face and a ton of giggles.

—

Everyone now stands in Price's office, waiting for the four men that had violated Simon and Soap's privacy to make their way in. Leah is in Price's chair, spinning in circles with a bored expression on her face while Alec colors on the ground with Sophie watching in amazement.

There's a knock on the door. Johnny makes his way over to Simon, standing next to him with his arms crossed as Price picks up off of his chair. "Come in!" He calls. The door opens. All recruits stand in the doorway, eyes widening at the scene in front of them. Rudy motion for the kids to follow them, talking to them in hushed tones as they make their way out the door while Alejandro scoops up Sophie.

"Da!" She calls out, twirling in his arms. Her face shows clear signs of distress and it breaks Johnny's heart to watch her leave like that but this was important. The grips on his arms tighten.

Once the kids are gone, the men step into the room all avoiding eye contact with their former superiors as they do so. No one speaks. Johnny can feel the rage coming off of the man behind him in waves and he resists the urge to step back into his space to comfort him. Price clears his throat, sitting, "Thank you for joining us, boys. I know that we've already discussed your punishments but I think that you owe these two an apology."

"Sorry, sir," They all apologize in unison. All but one. One that Soap

recognizes as Harris, a particular annoying recruit that always was a little too cocky for his own good while trained him. He resists the urge to snarl a demand to respect his captain's orders, knowing that he technically has no power over the man anymore.

Price raises a brow, lighting a cigar as he does so. He urges, "Harris?"

"Why should I apologize if it was true?" He asks. The question causes Ghost to bristle behind him and the other three recruits to slowly but surely take a couple of steps backwards. Price hardens his gaze while blowing out a puff of smoke.

"Because that's not why you were in trouble. I never said it wasn't true. I just told you the consequences of going around yapping about something that you had no business even knowing," He relays, calmly. Despite the cool expression on his face Soap could see the way that his eye had twitched. Laswell clenched her fists.

"I'm not apologizing to them," Harris retorts, "It was true. That's their own fault." Anger starts to bubble up in Soap's stomach at that response as his nails dig into his exposed arms, sure to leave indents.

Laswell then speaks up, "Your captain told you to apologize."

"And I said I'm not."

"You need to learn to respect the chain of command," She snaps, stepping forwards with her blue eyes in a fiery ablaze. Harris gives her back the same fury, slamming his hands on Price's desk as he does so. The captain sighs, signaling to the other recruits that they can go in which they greedily take that offer, stumbling out the door.

"Respect the chain of command?" Harris spits, "They're bloody shagging! Don't tell me to respect the chain of command when that's happening."

The anger boils over, turning into its own form of complete rage inside the former sergeant. Usually he'd keep his mouth shut and let Price or Laswell or even Ghost take the reigns but that seems basically impossible to him now. Soap lets out a laugh with no humor, stepping threateningly towards the recruit with a hand outstretched as he questions, "I'm sorry Laswell and Price. Give me a moment. Harris, are we active service?"

The man blinks at him in shock after seeing the barely concealed anger on his face. He sputters out, "N-No..."

“Then it’s none of your business,” Soap chides, getting louder as he does so, “Where I decide to put my dick. Now is it? I was once your superior officer and I request that you show me some respect. Is it any of your business who I’m ‘shagging’? Especially if it’s after my time in the service?”

The man stands there in stunned silence, hands slipping off the desk as he deflates while backing up a step. He shakes his head in shame. Price opens his mouth but before he can try to deescalate the situation, Ghost then says, “I don’t know why you’re refusing, whether you’re homophobic or something, I don’t necessarily care.”

He steps around Johnny, a dark look in his eyes. Harris takes two steps back with every movement forwards until his back hits the wall and he’s staring up at the former lieutenant with the fear of God in him, shaking like a leaf. The tall man barks, voice like acid, “I didn’t even come here for an apology. I could give a rat’s ass about that. I came here to tell you that if any harm comes to them because you couldn’t keep your bloody gob shut, you’ll have me to answer to. You don’t want to have to answer to me. So just fucking apologize and be done with it.”

“No need,” Price cuts in. Everyone in the room turns to look at him, brows furrowed in confusion all around. Except for Simon, who’s still hovering over Harris with murderous intent. “He’s getting dishonorably discharged for insubordination. I tried to be nice, son. This isn’t even the first brush I’ve had with you and you always promise to do better. But clearly you have not learned so I’ll have you out of here by morning. I wish you the best of luck in your future endeavors but there is no spot here for people like you. Pack your things. You’re dismissed.”

Harris stares at the captain, who doesn’t show any signs of lying whatsoever, in bewilderment. Price shoos him off as soon as he attempts to argue, not in the mood for anymore drama from the man. Simon steps back, shoving him towards the door. He throws a glare back, muttering, “I’m not homophobic by the way.”

“I don’t care,” Ghost responds.

After that, the man is gone.

—

The rest of the weekend went okay. They had shown the kids around the base and where they used to work. Price even allowed him to

show them some of the demo work he used to do, only Alec and Leah though, as Sophie was too young.

Rest assured, both Laswell and Price had the security of their family under control. It eased both of their anxieties.

They were back home now and the kids had already fallen asleep in the car since they wanted to stay for as long as possible. They talked about all of the things that Al and Rudy had taught them on the way home, even repeating some of the words they'd taught them in Spanish.

Johnny had carried them all to bed one by one, not letting Simon help since he seemed awfully quiet the whole ride back. Well, more than usual. When he came downstairs he found Simon standing in the middle of the entryway, staring at the balaclava while running a thumb along the skull pattern there. "Si?" He prods, placing his hands around the blond's wrists.

He looks up at him, blinking away some of the haze from his eyes. "You solid?" Johnny asks him. All he does is nod, placing the fabric on his back pocket. He moves forwards, wrapping his partner into a tight hug and the Scot sighs in content at the contact.

—

Monday morning was hard.

He had gone to wake up Simon only to find him still awake, staring at the wall. When he had attempted to speak to him the man didn't respond.

The world felt sort of like jelly. He was in his body but also wasn't. He had woken up like this, completely unsure of why but no matter what he did he couldn't seem to get himself out of it. He could comprehend that there was movements around him but it didn't entirely stick in his brain what was going on. He just felt numb. His brain felt like mush.

Johnny was in his vision. At first there was a deep concern before an understanding on his face and even though he could see him, everything still felt slightly unreal. As if he was still dreaming.

Moments of his life flashed behind his eyes at the same time that the current world around him had continued, forming a weird mixture of an in between state that he couldn't escape from.

He felt like liquid.

"Could you, Da"? I know you have work..." Johnny's voice had traveled through, "Thank you. I'm sorry it's just been a rough couple of days and I don't want to leave him like this. Sometimes this happens to him. It used to be after a mission gone bad but... No, I know I don't have to explain to you I just feel like— Alright. I love you. See you soon. Thanks again."

That was one of the brief seconds of somewhat clarity. Or at least, he thinks that it was seconds. Time wasn't real. So, he couldn't tell.

At some point the kids had come in to say goodbye, placing kisses that he couldn't really fully feel on his forehead as they did so. They said something to him but it had felt as if he was underwater, their voices too muffled for him to fully make out what was being told to him.

After a while of staring off, head fuzzy in a way that didn't feel like static but rather a constant pulling or kneading of a product like slime, he had recognized soft whispers in his ear. Every once in a while he'd be able to make out an, "I'm right here," or "Take as much time as you need."

A hand runs through his hair and it confuses him greatly. There's a part of him that just wants to move but he feels disconnected from it, as if he himself was an entirely different being on a different plane of existence. "You're safe, Si. We're in our room. In our bed. In our house. You are in my arms and we're all safe. Everything's alright."

Move, it screamed within him. But he couldn't. Speak. But that felt like something that he's never done before in his life. Usually the feeling of sudden paralyzation would freak him out, send messages up to his brain that something wasn't right. But right now he was too busy floating somewhere not even he could reach.

Fingers in his hair. Soft whispers in his ears.

Coming back is a steady buzz. It feels like electricity in his feet. Like they're tingling until the whole body responds the same way. It's not aggressive. It's steady. Slight. But there. Somehow, he hears his voice ask, "Happening again?"

“Yes, love,” Someone— Johnny responds.

He doesn’t respond again, brain mixed between the buzz and the float. Simon, that’s his name, knows that the rest of the day will be a slight in and out state after this. Maybe not as bad. Maybe worse. He’s not entirely sure.

He clenches his fist as sensation comes back to it. He then starts to recognize the calloused hands in his locks, rather than just slightly feeling them while also not at all. An arm wrapped around him that leads to a steady weight of a hand clasping one of his own. “It’s alright,” The Scottish drawl coos in his ear, “You’re alright.”

Johnny.

He had known the man was around him but he hadn’t entirely recognized him. The knowledge of who he was during his time in that state felt a bit too far for him to reach, just as everything else around him had. “Sorry,” Simon mutters, closing and opening his eyes harshly.

“None of that,” Johnny tells him, “You can’t control it. It’s a coping mechanism. We’ve talked about this every time that it’s happened and each time you apologize. Do you think you’re good to sit up?”

“Never cuddled with me before while it was happening,” He teases, still not fully back yet. So no, sitting up isn’t really in his cards at the moment.

He feels Johnny shrug, “You weren’t my boyfriend before.”

“Was always your boyfriend even when I wasn’t.”

Johnny lets out a gruff of amusement at that. They stay in that exact position until Simon feels enough in his own body to sit up and drink the offered water to him. He tries not to fall back into as his mind still feels slightly in a daze, although he knows that it’s inevitable and will probably happen at some point again today. “How long?” He asks his boyfriend.

“A couple hours. Don’t know how long you were awake before that, though.”

It didn’t feel like a couple hours at all. It felt so short but also like a

whole lifetime worth of laying there with unfocused ease trained on the wall in front of him. He frowns. How had the kids gotten to school? Sophie should be up by now.

As if sensing his distress, Johnny responds, “Da’ came and took the kids the school than offered to take Sophie for the day so that we could focus on you. He even offered to let the kids stay the night.” The Scot gives him a run down while combing his hand through the unkempt blond on the top of his head as the other man sips at the water. He closes eyes at the feeling, welcoming the shivers down his spine from it with gratefulness.

“Sorry,” He croaks again.

“Stop that,” Johnny softly scolds, “No need.”

He feels lips press to the top of his head and tries not to feel guilty about what he had just put his family through. Johnny wraps his arms around his neck, placing his lips on his shoulder and breathing in Simon’s scent as the man places the cup back on the nightstand. It was probably so scary to see him in that catatonic state. That was a particularly bad episode. Most of the time he’s able to just get by with maybe a cotton filled head throughout the day with moments of staring off in his free time.

But it had been a bad weekend. He had a moment where crushing fear of reliving one of his greatest traumas had taken over his body and although he’s always scared of losing them, that felt a little close to how he lost his other them. His childhood family. So it makes sense that he had went into a bad one this time. “Hey, Si,” Johnny mumbles into his shirt.

Simon opens his eyes, letting out a hum in acknowledgment. “You still with me?” He questions.

All the former lieutenant can do is nod. The cotton feeling is back but he’s actively fighting not to fall away into the floating again so he hopes that it will work. His voice sounds troubled. The way it would when he’s thinking about how to approach a topic or if it’s even worth approaching at all. But Simon guesses he decided that it was as he proposes, “Do you maybe want to discuss therapy again, mo leannan? It’s your choice obviously and I don’t want to force you. I promise, I’m only suggesting it to help you because I know it helped me. A lot. I want you at peace.”

He thinks on it. The last time he’d gone to therapy, it ended horribly

for him. Simon's different than Johnny. He can't be fixed. Too much wrong has happened to him and he's too damaged. "Johnny, I don't think it'll work. They'll just tell me I'm out of my mind and give me medication; which I refuse to take because my family has a history of drug addiction," He huffs out, "I love you. So much. And if this gets too hard—"

"It's not that. You're not too much for me, Simon. I just want you to be okay, is all. I love you too and if you don't want to that's fine. I was just offering because I'm sure Dr. Gerber would take you off the books, maybe even do a home visit, if I asked. He seems to be understanding like that," Johnny comforts him, scratching at his scalp followed by him pressing a kiss where his shoulder and neck meet.

It should scare Simon that he had known what he was thinking before the words had even come out. The fear of being too much. But he had squashed that down immediately, not letting it fester in his mind for even half a second.

He's never had someone love him to that extent. So for him, Simon will deeply consider if therapy is something that he'd attempt again. For his own peace, for Johnny's, and for their families. He turns his head, kissing his partner before pulling back and saying, "Alright, Johnny. I'll think on it."

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed :) you guys all wanted Simon working through his issues as well this is how author begins to present it towards you. <3 much love

More Al and Rudy in the future. No worries. Laswell too my beloved

Therapy

Chapter Summary

Simon goes to therapy. There's a bit of a miscommunication

Chapter Notes

You guys are being way too kind to me. I love reading ur comments it makes my fuckin day <3 much love to you guys fr

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"So, can you tell me a bit about yourself?"

"... "

"... Please?"

"... "

Believe it or not, he was really trying.

Johnny had somehow magically convinced his therapist, Dr. Gerber, to do an off the books, private, in home session for him. After he had agreed, of course. It wasn't like he was purposely trying to give the poor old man a hard time after he had driven all the way out here. It's just... hard for him.

Therapy means opening up; something Simon isn't too good at. Hell, it took him a weekend from hell to finally tell his boyfriend almost everything about his past. Almost. There's some aspects that Soap still doesn't know and part of him wants to keep it that way. Protect him from the horrors. Another part, however, wants to run to Johnny and collapse in his arms as he tells him every bad thing that has ever happened to him. To ask him to protect him.

He knows Soap would. That's why he struggles with it.

"So," Dr. Gerber sighs, "You're one of those patients, aye? Going to take us a bit for you to realize I'm not here to hurt you, correct? That's fine. You experienced a lot of... pain in your lifetime haven't you?" The assumption sends his mind to a full stop with loud squeezing tires that have smoke coming from them. Now how the hell did he figure

that one out? He hasn't even said anything. Simon tries to keep the same emotionless expression on his face as he glances at the clock in the corner. Fifteen minutes left.

He asks, "What makes you say that?"

"Call it a hunch," The therapist responds, smiling patiently. His green eyes bore into the other man's heavy and broken soul, as if he was made of nothing but glass. Polished so one could see right through. The skin underneath of Simon's balaclava itches at the thought.

"I'm only doing this for Johnny," The blond suddenly says, locking eyes with him, "So don't expect too much from me."

It's cold. It's exactly who he is to people who aren't in his "circle" as you'd call it. That's why he didn't wear the mask and instead the balaclava. Something about the idea of therapy had him running back into the mannerisms that kept him alive for so long after the world had given him it's worst.

The therapist purses his lips at that, followed by a slight narrowing of the eyes. He sits back, setting down the notebook as he then begins with, "For Johnny-"

"Only I call him that."

It's as if he had given the man the key to the greatest treasure in the world at that response. He perks up. Not by much but it's noticeable to Simon. "Right..." He trails off, "Sorry. For John... Forgive me, Simon, but you seem to do things mostly for him rather than yourself... Why is that?"

"Because he deserves it. I don't do things for me. I do things for my family. All that matters is keeping them happy," Simon simply informs.

"And what about you being happy?"

He feels his eye twitch at the question. He is happy. He's the happiest that he's ever been in God knows how long. This was a life that he would never trade for the world and it sounded as if the therapist was insinuating something that he didn't quite appreciate too much. So, he grits out, "I am happy."

Dr. Gerber frowns. Simon rips his gaze away, instead focusing on the seconds that ticked away on the clock. Every moment that passes. If

he focused enough, he could hear the way the cogs within sounded as they worked together to make the thing work, he's sure of it. Or maybe the outside world functioning. Maybe he could hear Johnny and Sophie doing whatever they're doing at the store.

But he can't. Because they're too far away and he's not superhuman, even if people once whispered to one another that he was.

And that makes him realize that they're out there alone again. In the cool, harsh, unpredictable work that has no problem taking and taking and taking until you have nothing else to give. Until you're left standing around in a pile of smoke and rubble wondering where it could have possibly all went completely wrong as one question burns on your tongue; Why? He grips the couch cushion as sweat starts to build underneath the fabric and his heart begins to pound in his chest. The therapist's eyes track that movement.

"I never said you weren't," Dr. Gerber responds, "I can see that you two have built a wonderful life together and as great as it is that you're so protective over them and loving; I can't help but feel as if you're neglecting yourself in the process. Too focused on everyone else."

He doesn't quite understand. What is there to focus on? There's not much more to him anymore. He's not sure if there ever was. Even as a small child, life has never really been about him but more of tiptoeing around a man that could snap any second. It had always been about one thing. Surviving.

After his home life had long since improved with said man gone, the world continued to teach him that lesson. But it's not like that for everyone. Only some. He just happened to be one of the unlucky ones. Simon's not saying that he has had it particularly worse than anyone else or anything; just everyone has their own roles in this life and his had been... Whatever all of that was. Being Ghost? Becoming Ghost? Maybe that's all it comes down to. Life had terrorized him and taught him how to push through in order to become that enigma.

That was all. Focusing on inner peace has never really been on the cards for someone like him. Neglecting himself? How does one neglect themselves in this context, especially if he's content about where his life is at? So he says, "I don't understand."

"You're not allowing yourself to fully process whatever it is that happened to you. Since, you never denied that something did.

Whatever it was may haunt you for the rest of your life, I'm not going to lie to you and tell you that it won't or that I can make all of that go away forever. Because that's not how trauma works. But it doesn't have to have the hold over you that it does now and although the people around you matter, so do you."

Something about that causes a pang deep in his heart. Johnny tells him all of the time that he matters so why did hearing this man that he's never talked to outside of pleasantries saying it open some sort of wound in him? A tight knot ties itself around his chest, his throat, his stomach— anywhere it can reach. He refuses to let it win. "I don't matter more than anyone else," He argues.

"True. But you don't matter any less either."

Simon shifts his focus back onto the clock. Two minutes left. He waits until there's thirty seconds left and he hears the telltale sign of Johnny's car pulling up to the house before he looks at Dr. Gerber. "I was buried alive once," He informs.

The man seems taken aback by the sudden honesty as he fumbled for some type of footing. If he's doing therapy, why not make it fun for him too? He was a cruel bastard. That's for sure.

Just when the therapist finally seems to know what to say, the door opens and in comes his boyfriend along with their youngest daughter. He has her in one arm and shopping bags all lined up on the other. The therapist gives him a knowing smirk, seeming to catch onto what he had just done as he lets out a quiet chuckle to himself. Simon winks.

Then, he stands and starts taking the bags from Johnny, heart beating fast for a more positive reason now as he leans forward to place a kiss on his lips while lifting the balaclava. It's quick. Simple. Still, it makes every single nerve in his body relax and he thinks he prefers that kind of therapy more. He places a kiss on Sophie's head after. "Welcome back, love," He greets, taking the groceries from the Scot so that he could get in the door.

"Hey, mo leannan," He smiles brightly, "How was therapy?"

"Oh, you know," He shrugs. The taller one of the two wants to play it off as if they had a normal session. Dumb on his part. Johnny knows him too well. Those blue eyes turn into ones of half lidded annoyance as Simon stares innocently at him.

He pointedly turns his head to Dr. Gerber, interrogating, "He didn't say a damn word, did he?" The only clarification that he gets back is the older gentleman making a zipping lips motion with his mouth, the double meaning ever so present. Cheeky bastard. He says his goodbyes and leaves the couple to it with a promise of "talking more" next week thrown specifically in the blond's direction.

Soap lulls his attention back over to him, not even breaking that facial expression that shouldn't be as hot as it is to Simon. The former lieutenant slips off the balaclava. "Da!" Sophie yells as soon as she recognizes him. He smiles at her.

"Simon," Johnny grumbles, "Don't tell me you did the thing where you just randomly drop some lore about yourself right before you make your exit."

All he does is walk away from him, innocent grin that was thrown behind him practically etched on his face as he makes his way around the archway towards the kitchen.

—

"Show me again!" Alec yells in glee. Johnny looks up from where he was hammering to see Leah and Alec giggling at Simon further off into the backyard while Sophie sits in her baby swing nearby, excitedly screaming every time her father pushes her lightly. Yes, they decided to get the kids a play set. Johnny figured that they were going to be hosting a lot of things outside in the nearby future once this damn deck is done so why not have some actual entertainment outside for them?

The blond sighs, holding up his hands again as Alec throws a punch into his palm. Riley barks at them, placing his front onto the ground as he does so with a wagging tail. The sight causes Soap to almost drop the hammer on his toe as he manages to jump away from it a second with a curse under his breath. He starts stalking towards his family. "Si!" He calls out, "What're you doing?"

"Kid wants to know how to throw a punch," His boyfriend responds once he's close enough. As he comes up to stand besides Simon and push down his hands out of position slowly, he raises an eyebrow at their boy. A feeling of suspicion pricks at his stomach.

"Why?"

It wasn't aimed towards the man next to him at all. Instead, their son.

He feels a kiss on his temple before an arm is wrapped around his waist, pulling him flush into the steady muscle besides him along with more kisses peppered all over his face. Alec screws up his feature while Leah makes a sound of “Awe” at them and Johnny lets some of his suspicions wash down the drain. Only some.

“I saw you guys and uncle Gaz doing it!” Alec tells him, bouncing upwards, “I want to be as strong and tough as you guys one day!” The sentiment causes the rest of his wariness to fade away into a pit of strong emotion as it tugs at his heartstring.

Based on the way that the hand on his waist tightens, Simon feels the same. Slowly, his lips pull into an expression of complete smugness as he says, “Yeah? And you’re learning from him?”

“You’re better off learning from me, Alec. Don’t listen to him,” Simon whispers. Johnny turns to defend himself against that tiny jab but he’s silenced by a pair of lips on his own. He forgets all about it immediately.

After they pull away, he looks between the boys with narrowed eyes. They’re both giving him matching hopeful stares and he can’t help but give into that. “Be careful,” He huffs, “Don’t punch your dad anywhere but his hands, alright? You have twenty minutes because I’m taking Leah with me to go pick up some McDonalds for dinner since it’s already getting late. Unless you want to stay here and learn too?”

Leah shakes her head at him, reaching out to grab his hand and attempt to pull him away from Simon’s grip. He laughs slightly, “Noo jist haud on!” She groans, letting go of him to cross her arms impatiently as she waits.

Johnny shakes his head at her before he turns around in Simon’s grip, cupping his face in between his hands as he does so. “Seriously, don’t let me come back to any bloody noses,” He gently murmurs.

His boyfriend smiles at him, eyes shining with love and adoration in the setting sun around them. He places another hand on his hip as he states, “I promise, love. I’ll also make sure to get it in that skull of his that you only do it to defend yourself. That’s something that you weren’t quite able to grasp onto for a bit there, right?”

Johnny furrows his eyebrows in confusion at him. It takes him a moment to understand what the hell he could possibly mean before it comes back to him. Punching that one guy in the face before locking

him in his car. The memory still brings a rumble of humor into his chest. "That guy had it coming," He justifies.

"I'm sure he did, Johnny." He can tell by the way that it's said that he doesn't believe that even the littlest bit.

"Bastard," Johnny mumbles, low enough only for Simon to be able to hear, "You're lucky I love you." The brunet leans forwards before placing a peck of goodbye onto his lips and walking back over to Leah, scooping her up in his arms as he passes her. She squeals.

Simon calls after, "I love you too!"

After dinner, they both sat in the living room as they watched some movie to pass by time. The kids had been exhausted from playing outside earlier meaning they had wanted to get to bed at more than reasonable time tonight. After bathing that is. So now they sat, legs in Simon's lap as he gripped at his ankle gently. Meanwhile, Johnny had the man's bad arm splayed across his own, massaging the muscles there in hopes to relieve some of the tension from all of the activity earlier.

It's a common routine.

It makes Soap feel old.

Yet, somehow he doesn't mind it too much. In fact, he quite enjoys this time that they share together as they do mundane things. The comfort of their own home is something that Johnny has grown to appreciate as time went on, no longer feeling as though he was losing his mind staring at the same four walls every day as he body screamed at him to do more.

That part of him has silenced a bit now. Not totally. That's why he's doing this like building a whole deck because he can't just not do something physical with himself. It'll really make him lose it. "So," Simon suddenly starts, "You were right. I didn't say a word during therapy yesterday and when I did, it was at the very end of the session when I could make my escape."

He turns to look at his partner who seems almost... apologetic? Which, he's not too sure about. Why would he feel the need to inform him of that, as if he had done something wrong? Sure, he had messed with him about it but it wasn't meant to be taken seriously at all. "I

mean, if that's what works for you, Si," The Scot responds, sitting up more to pay closer attention to him, "Then that's what works."

Simon avoids all eye contact as he explains, "I just don't want you to think that I'm not trying. I am."

His confusion softens into an understanding as he cups his hand onto the side of Simon's head and pulls him forwards until he can place a kiss onto his blond locks. "I know you're trying. If this has anything to do with how I responded, I'm sorry. I hadn't meant to come off that way at all, I was just teasing you. Simon, therapy is yours. You don't have to explain to me that you're trying or try to proof anything to me when it comes to that.

"It's not about what me or anyone else thinks. It's about if it works for you. This is about you. Not me, okay?" He pulls him in close, rubbing an open palm on his chest as he does so. Simon nods.

Then he smirks, chuckling, "It had nothing to do with the teasing but I appreciate that apology nonetheless." Two hands grab at the former sergeant's waist before he finds himself in his boyfriend's lap, faces inches apart. The blond then shakily adds on, voice hardly loud enough for even him to hear, "I was just going to say that I think maybe physical therapy might work a bit better."

Johnny's head turns to mush as his body rises in temperature at the gruff in his tone. He rumbles in interest before placing two hands behind Simon onto the back of the couch, using it as leverage to readjust himself into a position where he can straddle him instead. "How might that work out?"

The hands on his hips tighten enough to where they could leave bruises. Simon's eyes darken. He moves closer, growling into Soap's ear, "Why don't I show you?"

All Johnny can do is breathlessly say back, "I'd like that."

"Knew you would."

They meet each other in a passionate kiss, hands fall off of the couch to clutch onto the man underneath of him's shirt instead. Meanwhile, His boyfriend's own pull him impossibly closer before he bites down on Johnny's lip, causing Scot to let out a tiny gasp. It's just enough to where Simon can slide his tongue over the mark in apology before slipping it into the other's mouth. How could someone be so intoxicating? All Soap wants at that moment is to drown into him and

forget about everything else. He might just do that.

It's not until Simon starts placing open mouthed kisses down his neck that Johnny comes back to his senses. "Wait," He pants, "We were having a serious conversation about you and therapy."

"Much rather be doin' this," He replies against his skin. The hot air sends a pleased shiver down his back and it takes everything in him to not accept that answer as it is, allowing himself to sink further into this.

He pulls away, grabbing Simon's hair in his fist and gently detaching his mouth. "Si," Johnny chides, still heaving as he tries to get his brain to stop thinking about anything else but this. It's a hard battle. Those brown eyes look up at him with concern. "Talk first. Then sex."

The man exhales, letting go of his waist and letting his hands hit the couch with a thump. He swallows. Nothing else comes from his mouth, signifying that Soap had been at least part way right in his assumption. He will keep this moment in mind.

Johnny turns the fist into soothing scratching through his scalp, watching Simon flutter his eyes closed at the sensation as they sit for a moment to allow themselves to calm down. Just enough so they can continue the conversation. Eventually, his partner speaks again, "Therapy just makes me all out of sorts and in a way, panicky? That's why I avoid it. Usually I'll just sit there without saying a word and they'll get the hint. Let me go. I got away with it in the military because of who I was but I guess there's no getting past you..."

He opens up his eyes again, searching the blue orbs in front of him. Soap smiles, "I'm a force to be reckoned with, Lt."

"That's for damn sure."

"Look," He mutters, "Therapy is going to make you feel all out of sorts. If you don't want to, Simon, that's okay. I'll love you all the same. I fell in love with a man that had a reputation of slaughtering people mercilessly. There's not much you could do to deter me. So I guess I just want to make sure that you're doing it for you. Not me."

The taller man lets out a laugh at the part about whom the person on top of him had fallen for. That was the desired effect so Johnny can't help but feel a little proud of himself for that. Then, Simon sighs, "I'm not. I'm doing it for you."

The pride in his chest drops to a deep feeling of worry at that. It must be visible on his face because two pale hands come up, smoothing back his slightly unruly mohawk before landing on his cheeks. There's an earnesty on the blond's features along with determination.

Simon pulls forwards, allowing their foreheads to rest against one another as they breathe into each other's spaces. Johnny closes his eyes. Comforting circles are thumbled into his stubble covered cheeks. He lets them fall into a soothing silence where they both wordlessly pass their feelings onto each other, something they do after they realize that they're not necessarily on the same page. Take a second. Relax. Appreciate that even when they're not in total agreement of something that the other is doing, they still are a team and are together.

When they had first gotten together, they had both made it clear that they didn't want to lose each other. Simon especially. Not that this would be something that could break them. This is a simple misunderstanding. He's not angry or anything. Hardly disappointed.

It's just... he wishes that his boyfriend would realize that it's okay to ask for help. But he's not going to be the thing that forces him to do something that he isn't entire comfortable doing, even if it's subconsciously.

This won't break them. This could never break them. It's still nice to take a second anyways. Something that they had agreed upon doing so that the kids will never have to see them argue; something that both of them have expressed discomfort with. If they are too mad at each other, they'll take a moment separately too cool down rather than this. It's never gotten to that, though. Johnny pulls away, saying incredibly softly, "If you don't want to do it, that's fine Simon. Really. I can call up Dr. Gerber tomorrow. But I can't be the thing that's making you do something that you don't really want to do, even if it's unintentional. Even if I don't know. That just builds up resentment over time and I don't want that for us. I know you don't either."

The other man thinks on that, seeming to never have seen it from that perspective. They lock eyes again. "I don't ever want you to be something I resent," He squeaks. There's a fear in those pools of brown. It's unreachable to Johnny. So deep in that if he had tried to reach it, surely he'd get lost himself instead. It's an old one. It's not new. He gets it any time they talk about certain things; for example the fighting. And he's struggling to figure out the pattern.

He whispers back, “Me either. And I don’t want to ever resent you for anything either, Si.”

There’s a heavy silence now. It feels like weights on their limbs as they both look away from one another, focusing on something else instead. Johnny the wall. Simon the tv playing behind the Scot. He feels his fingers fall from his boyfriend’s hair, retracting it back to himself.

Hard conversations are the worst. They’re not fighting. Yeah, they’re not fighting but they’re both coming to a strong realization anyways as they both rack their brains for a way to fix it. They’re at a standstill. In all honesty, the choice is really up to Simon but he has to figure out how to get rid of this guilt weighing on his chest without making the other feel bad. “I’m sorry if I made you feel like you had to,” He settles on.

“It wasn’t you” Simon responds, “Sure, I was doing it for you. But you never made me feel forced. If I had, I think I would’ve been extra defiant and then we would’ve been looking at a whole different situation... I just wanted to be better for you.”

Johnny lets out a sigh, grabbing his chin and affirming, “You’re perfect. Just the way you are. You don’t need to change for me, I accept and love you as you are. You’re fucking perfect, do you understand?” There’s no heat in his tone as he says it but there is a whole lot of determination that he hadn’t heard from himself since his days on the field. But he wants— no— needs Simon to understand. This was never about John. This was about Simon.

When he had kissed him, he had agreed to all of their days together; good or bad. Johnny wanted Simon, knowing that he could be a little standoffish with others at times or he had a thing about people to close. He knew that bad days were *bad*. Or that there was a dark past looming over him, following him around like a dog. That will never change.

Speaking of dogs. He screws up his features, twisting around his top half to look around the living room. “Where’s Riley?”

“Leah’s room. He sleeps in there now. Traitor,” Simon murmurs, looking upwards at the ceiling. Johnny nods, relaxing his posture again before moving to finally remove himself off of his partner’s lap. Two hands stop him.

“I want to go still,” The man blurts, “For me. I promise. But you can’t

expect me not to want to be the best possible version of myself that I can be for you. I know that you say I'm perfect. And I do believe that you see me as such. But there's still so many things that *I* want to work on in order to feel like I am deserving of that sentiment. But I promise, I'll make sure that it's equally about that and wanting myself to let go as much as I possibly can."

He debates that in his head. Si's right about one thing. Johnny can't expect him to not want to be the best version of himself for him because at the end of the day, the former sergeant is trying to be the best version of himself for Simon too.

So, he moves his head up and down in confirmation. That works. As long as it's not all about trying to please Johnny, it works. "You promise?"

"I don't lie, Johnny," Simon repeats that same phrase he always down, hooking a hand behind his neck, "I promise... I love you."

"I love you too, Si."

They trade a gentle press of lips. A final seal to that conversation and the agreement. Once they detached, Johnny doesn't go very far. Instead, he even leans in a bit and drops his tone an octave or two to rumble out, "Like a good ole' boy, Simon."

The heat returns back in the air at that sentence alone as he watches the man's pupils blow out, eyes falling into that half-lidded stare. "Careful, Johnny," He replies, "I thought we were having a serious conversation."

Johnny licks his lips, brown eyes tracking the motion hungrily. He moves hand over to grip at Simon's chin again, this time bringing his thumb to trace over his lips. He mumbles, "Thought the conversation was over?"

"It is," The blond swallows. His voice is slightly shaky but very definite. Johnny stands, grabbing the collar of his shirt to bring him with, a devious look on his face.

"What was it I said? Conversation first? Then," He trails off, feigning thoughtfulness before letting go of the fabric and smoothing it out with his palm slowly as he looked up at his boyfriend through his lashes.

"Johnny," Simon pleases, "You're being a fuckin' tease."

“Am I really being a tease if I’m delivering exactly as promised?” He considers out loud, motioning with his head towards the stairs as he turns on his heel, “As always, not here. C’mon.”

He doesn’t think he’s ever seen Simon follow him that fast.

Chapter End Notes

:) it’s kinda a filler but I thought you’d like how Simon’s first therapy session went

Also Dr. Gerber literally begging Simon to just tell him ONE thing about himself 🤔🤔

The Alec thing may or may not be important

Bullies

Chapter Summary

We find out why Leah has been struggling so much lately and Simon and Johnny almost fight their child's headmaster over it.

Tough conversations need to had.

Chapter Notes

Tw // car accidents in this chapter along with slight descriptions of the abuse Simon went through and witnessed as a kid

(tw // graphic description of car accidents, throwing up. Will let you know when it's safe.)

Theres music playing and laughter in her ears as she locks eyes with the woman in front of her, singing loudly to the song as Alec played on his iPad. Sophie was asleep next to her. The only light in the car was from the touch screen radio, illuminating the brown hair that blows in Scotland's wind. A deep chuckle comes from her father. His hands were on the wheel and every once in a while, he'd look back through the rear view with his blue eyes shining happily. His own borderline black hair ruffles every once in a while.

Leah is happy.

At some point, she can't really fully remember when, the light in the car had changed. Now everything was so much brighter as two spotlights shone in from the window, practically blinding her. Her mother's face had turned into terror as she reaches out and grab's at the driver's arm, yelling out, "Chris!"

After that there's a loud crunching and the world went black. When she comes to again, she feels a stinging pain in her forehead and a coolness dripping down her face. Leah dazedly blinks. She looks around the car, registering the sound of a baby wailing at the top of her lungs and a prolonged beeping of the horn coming from it. Alec's head rests against her shoulder as he slowly starts to also register everything around him.

Mom and dad aren't moving. Leah quickly unbuckles her seatbelt, climbing to the front and taking in the smushed in state that it's in. Something about

the way her parents looked immediately didn't feel right and she turned to Alec after the sound of a seatbelt retracting can be heard. She sticks out her hand while staring at him with wide eyes, yelling, "Don't! Alec, don't come up here."

He sobs loudly, "I want Mommy and Daddy!"

She does too. Lord knows that she does. But her Mommy had always taught her to protect her siblings if she can't and the way her head lazily lays on the dashboard as blood steadily dripped from her...all over... Leah doesn't want to think about it, hot tears building up behind her eyes. She crawls over to Alec, ignoring how the glass from the windshield cuts into her tiny palms, "Alec, get out. See if you can get a phone!"

She pushes open his door. He stares back at her as if she had just grown three heads and she knows how it sounds. Leah doesn't seem like a five year old. She sounds like she's an adult but right now, she's the oldest one currently awake in the car. They need her.

So, she pushes Alec out, waiting until she hears him running off to the other car to turn back to her mother, shaking her. "Mommy?" The young girl squeaks. No response. Her body moves dramatically with each jostle as tears fall out of Leah's eyes. "Mommy, please," She begs. Nothing.

It was pointless. She goes to turn to her father but lets out an involuntary scream upon seeing him, covering her eyes and whipping away. Bile raised up in her throat and she clambered over to the open car door, spilling her stomach's contents out as horrified sobs wracked her body. She's not going to get into it. Her brain wouldn't let her if she tried. All that she really remembers is turning her head over to her father and then a blank slate in her memory before it resumes back to when she screamed.

"Leah!" Alec cries out, "You alright?"

She turns her head, brother now standing a couple feet away from the car with a phone in his little hands. He was bleeding too, she realizes. Leah nods, croaking out a, "Stay— Stay there, Al..." through her rough throat. The boy shifts in his spot, nodding. Mommy was a no go. Daddy was....

Leah shakes her head, trying to will away that image.

That just leaves Sophie.

Upon realizing that the baby was still in the car as the loud wailing comes back to her, she turns and rushes over to her. The relief that she feels seeing that she's totally okay is enough for her to let out another choked

out sound before using her shaky tiny hands to release her from the carseat. "I got you, wee yin," She soothes, "Leah's got you."

She closes her eyes, trying to remember how her mommy taught her to hold a baby. Support the head. That was the big rule. Leah grabs the newborn, using one hand to keep her head steady as she places her to her chest. Then, scoots out into the dark night.

The cool air stings the cuts on her face but it beats the smell of gasoline and copper any day. They had ended up in a ditch a little ways away from the road, grass torn up from the tires. Leah chooses not to look back. Instead she buries her fingers into the dirt, it using it as leverage as she climbs up to her brother. The feeling of it caking underneath her fingernails will be something that will remain in her brain for the rest of her life. She knows it.

SAFE

"Come on," She urges once standing in front of him, leading them to sit on the edge of the road. Sophie now lays in her lap as she takes the phone from her brother, trembling. He looks back at the other truck involved.

"Other guy wasn't waking up. Had to take phone."

"You did good, Alec," Leah praises. Her fingers slowly dial the number of emergency services as she looks around at the empty road illuminated by nothing but crushed up headlights. Once the operator answers, the dam inside of the five year old had broken.

"Hello? My name is Leah Mactavish," She cries, "There's been an accident and my Mommy and Daddy aren't waking up!" The tremors in her hands had gotten worse and the feeling of nausea had come back full swing at this point. She just wants her parents.

The dispatcher's voice is calm as she answers, "Hi, Leah. My name is Deana. Can you tell me where you are? What happened?"

Leah lets out a breath, nodding. "There was a car accident... I don't know where we are. I'm sorry I don't know. Will you still be able to come to us? We're really scared. It's dark out." Alec has now started to let out his own tears, shuffling closer to his sisters and placing a hand on the screaming infant. He chewed on his free hand's fingernails.

"We will certainly find you, love. I promise. You said 'us', who else is with you?"

"My-My brother and my sister. Shes a baby. Our Mommy and Daddy aren't waking up and I don't know what to do! Im only five years old," She explains, stumbling over her words in the process as the nausea fully sets in. Her heart was beating so fast. Leah whips her head around to check for any cars coming more frequently and wishing one would magically appear. The sound of an adult in her ear was comforting but not completely soothing away her anxiety.

She just wants her Mommy and Daddy.

"Take deep breaths for me, hun. Are you still in the car?" Deana asks, voice gentle. Leah inhales through her nose in an attempt to listen and calm her racing heart.

She exhales, "No. No, I got us all out."

"You are very brave little girl, Leah." The sentiment helps clear her clouded mind that feels as if she's doing everything wrong and the situation is beyond her control. She sighs, turning her attention back onto the road. There's lights approaching.

She exclaims, "I see a car!"

"That's good!"

The driver speeds up upon seeing the wreckage in the road before skirting to a full stop as a man jumps out of the driver's side door, running over to the children sitting on the side of the road. He looks to be about Aunt Clara's age. "Steaming Jesus!" He breathes, checking over the children, "Are you alright?"

The two children don't answer verbally, instead shaking their head up and down in an affirmative motion enthusiastically. Leah would cry if she wasn't doing so already. The man's brown eyes rake over the scene, widening as he takes in the severity. "Leah, can you give the phone to an adult, please?" Deana requests, reminding Leah that she was still on the line.

The little girl holds out the phone to the man, not saying a word as he faces his attention on the electronic before taking it. "Hello?" He greets. Leah can hear the muffled sound of Deana's voice speaking to him and he visibly loosens his muscles before mumbling something about smart kids.

As he relays what he sees and where they are to her, Leah finds herself fully slipping into a state of fuzziness. Eyes unfocused even as the sounds of sirens can be heard in the distance, signifying that they'll be okay. Well, at

least her and her siblings will be.

Leah wakes up, chest heaving as sweat drips from her body. There's a deep terror gnawing at her heart as she doesn't even wait to fully recognize that she's in her room and throws off the blanket to run to the only place her brain recognized as safe. She bursts through her fathers' door. Both of them sit up from their sleep, eyes falling on her as she rushes over to them. She climbs up into their bed. "Dad! Daddy!"

She feel herself be brought up into her Dad's lap as he wraps his arms around her. She's shaking like a leaf. A pair of brown eyes come into her vision. Warm. Safe. "What happened, love?" Daddy asks. He reaches out his pale thumb to wipe away tears that she hadn't even realized she'd been shedding.

"I was there again!" She whimpers. There's a gentle kiss to the crown of her head and the scratching of Dad's stubble against her scalp is familiar. Safe. He rocks her back and forth with light shushes as she hiccups while Daddy works on telling her exactly where she is and that nothing can hurt her here.

She wonders how they're so good at this. Mommy and Daddy had usually just sung to her after a nightmare which slowly but surely chased away the bubbling in her stomach. But when her fathers comfort her, it seems like they also focus on grounding her in the process. Eventually, the hiccups turn into sniffling and the wide eyes turn into lazily dropping ones. She falls asleep.

"I'm worried about her, Si," Johnny tells his boyfriend, drying off his hands. He throws the towel over his shoulder as he turns to look at Simon who sat at the dining room table with Sophie in his arms. It's true. She's been acting off since she had gone back to school last month.

Simon purses his lips, tapping his foot against the wooden floor. He gets a thoughtful look on his face, the one that he gets whenever he's trying to think of the best course of action. "I've noticed she's been acting off recently again. Kind of like how she was when I first came here but worse this time. Very quiet. You don't think she's getting—"

Johnny's phone rings.

He pulls it out of his pocket, brows coming together as one as he

clutches the device tighter at the name across the screen. The Scot looks up at Simon, mumbling, "It's Leah's school..." The other man mimics the look of confusion, quieting down Sophie as he watches him press the answer button and bring it to his ear.

"John Mactavish," He greets.

"Sir, we need you to come down immediately..."

—

They burst through the door of the office, causing the workers to jump at the suddenness of the action as they scan the area for their daughter. Rage boiled beneath Johnny's skin, one unlike he's ever felt before in his life. He swore that red clouded around the corners of his vision as he looked around the typical office decor to not see Leah anywhere. "Where the hell is she?" He growls. One of the ladies point a delicate finger towards the door that lead to the headmaster's room.

Both men make their way over. He thanks God for whatever sanity they had to drop off Sophie at Gaz's once he makes his way to where Leah is. Inside sat four people. The headmaster; a petite woman with blonde hair pulled back into a tight bun, a young brat of a boy, and Ava. Now, seeing her was enough to make his blood run hot in a bad way. But then there was his daughter. Her brown hair that had been pulled back into a braid was now messy and cut way shorter than it had been this morning. An uneven bob. Her face was red and puffy from crying, a tired look in her usually bright eyes.

Soap wanted to murder.

Once she sees them, she lets out a "Daddy! Dad!" while jumping off of her chair. She throws herself onto John, wrapping arms around his waist as she begins to sob into his shirt. The boy had turned around at this point and was staring at the parents with wide eyes full of fear. He could only guess it was because of how absolutely massive they were from their time in the military and the look of murderous intent on their faces. A hand splays on the small of Johnny's back.

"Mr. Mactavish," The headmaster greets, "Mr. Riley. Sorry that we had to meet under such unfortunate circumstances." Her plaque reads Mrs. Johnson.

Simon grumbles back, "Likewise." But his gaze wasn't focused on her. It was zeroed in on Ava, who now squirmed slightly under it as she stared at her shoes in shame. Johnny rubbed comforting circles on

Leah's back before crouching down and cupping her face in his hands, using his thumb to wipe the salty water from her waterline.

"Solid?" He questions.

She shakes her head, letting out a distraught, "I want to go home."

He looks over at the headmaster who's staring at them in absolute heartbreak, her own look of guilt on her face. "Can she wait out in the main area? She's been through enough."

The woman nods. Johnny faces her again, "Why don't you go wait in one of the chairs out there, a ghràidh? We'll be out in a moment." Leah considers this before exhaling and going to leave, wiping her nose with her long, blue sleeve of her hoodie. Simon stops her in her tracks. He leans down, holding out the water bottle he had for her.

"We'll be out there soon, monster," He says to her sweetly. There's a sad glimmer in his eye when she takes it then squeezes his hand in thanks.

"Love you..." She sniffles.

"We love you too, monster."

The door clicks closed. As soon as she's gone, all forms of softness leaves his and Simon's features. They turn to glare at the other three people in the room, most likely having a red and black aura surround them as they make their way further into the office. Fury was clear on Simon's face as he turns to Ava and barks, "Of course it's your fuckin' kid."

His voice is harsh. The iciness of it obviously carries over well if the way the mother flinches is anything to go off of. "What the fuck is this?" Johnny demands, "A fuckin' tv show? Who cuts girls' hair in school anymore? What a lame gimmick."

"I understand that you're angry but please. Let's try to keep our tones calm and wording appropriate," Mrs. Johnson tries to reason. But the fury in Soap is too strong right now for reason. This brat cut their child's hair and she expects them to be what? Calm about it? He has half the mind to interrogate the little brat for an answer of why he did it. Simon's eye twitches.

"No, fuck that!" Johnny responds, placing his hand on the desk and turning to the kid, "Why'd you do it?"

Mrs. Johnson sighs, "Mr. Mactavish—"

"No, I want to know what possessed him to do this," He cuts her off. The agitation in her tone was annoying. Grating. It was almost enough to send him over the edge onto some type of rampage. He's not used to not being able to rough up someone that pisses him off enough like he could back when he was a sergeant. This is a kid. A child who was staring up at him with wide eyes.

"I-I- I don't know. I'm sorry, Mr. Mactavish," The kid manages to stumble out, voice shaking as he does so, "And Mr. Riley. I'm sorry."

He doesn't know? How could he not know. Johnny straightens his back as Simon places a comforting hand on it again, clutching a little bit at the fabric of his shirt. Ava steps around her son to face him head on, snapping, "Patrick said he's sorry. Back off. You're obviously upsetting him."

"You know it's awfully funny that you're telling me to back off. Weren't you the one purposely ignoring how uncomfortable I was with your flirting until my boyfriend had to say something to you at our *child's birthday party*? Practice what you preach."

He knows that it was a low blow but no one's perfect. Certainly not him. Especially not when it comes to the ones that he loves being hurt in some type of way. Look, John's an understanding man. He tries to see things from other people's perspectives and he does fairly well at it. However, that all goes directly out the window as soon as a situation like this occurs.

She stares at him in shock, mouth opening and closing as her eyes dart between him and her son; Who was now glaring at her as he sat up. Mouth pressed in a firm line and jaw set. Right. Ava is married. Oops.

Maybe that was a little too far.

"Oh, Jesus Christ," Mrs. Johnson mumbles, rubbing at her forehead with wide eyes trained on a cup with pens.

Johnny licks his lips, scratching at the stubble on his chin before he steps closer to Ava. She focuses her gaze on him again, hardening it. He points towards the direction of the main office area, practically vibrating in fury. "My daughter is out there right now, sobbing with half of her God damn hair cut off because of your snot nosed kid. You think I care about how upset he is when I have no answers on why the hell he decided to do that to her? All I got is an 'I don't know' and

that's not good enough."

Ava slumps, looking back at Patrick. She lets out an exhale, "It's been tough at home. He's just acting out."

"And that means he can take it out on Leah, right?" Simon snorts sarcastically. Patrick scuffs his foot on the ground, watching the action with a slight pout on his face.

"He's being suspended," Mrs. Johnson supplies, "So that would be a no. If Patrick's really having a hard time with some... at home issues..." She looks between Ava and Johnny, an awkward edge on her tone. The other woman looks at her nails to avoid eye contact while he just crosses his arms at the action with a barely contained scoff. The headmaster continues, "Then we have resources available to help him through this time. You could even get a therapist for him. But his terrorization of Leah Mactavish ends today."

Something about that sentence causes a big exclamation point to go off in Johnny's brain along with a bunch of alarms and red flags. Simon tenses up behind him. They both slowly turn their heads over to the woman in charge, eyebrows furrowed in an accusatory way. The Scot makes a waving motion with his hand as he laughs dryly, no humor, "W-Wait. Why are you saying that like it's happened before? As if this isn't the first time you're hearing about this."

Ava whips her head over to him, no longer paying attention to her nails. "What?" She asks, turning to the headmaster, "You— You haven't been telling them?"

Telling them? Telling them what? He could feel the anger reaching its breaking point as his nostrils flared at a particularly harsh puff of air. He urged himself to calm down but the surprise on Ava's face had already confirmed his suspicion. He thinks back to how mean Leah used to be with Alec or how she seemed hesitant to go into school at times. How lately, she's been having more nightmares and crying more often rather than the happy, bubbly girl she had been during summer. He feels his own nails pierce into the palm of his skin, fists shaking with how tightly he had them clenched.

"Their family was having a hard time. They were in an adjustment period—"

"Oh my God," Ava shrills, "Are you actually trying to defend yourself right now? That's bullshit. You're not serious. So now that you know my family is going through a tough time are you just not going to

update us on our son?"

Simon grits out, "Ava, how long has this been going on?"

"Since last fucking school year. I thought you knew... That's why I didn't bring him to Alec's party..."

Johnny sees red. Officially. He backs up, feeling as if he can't breathe from the rage boiling inside of him. He needs to get out of here. He needs to go to his daughter. Simon looks at him in concern, reaching out to him but retracting his hand before it even touches him. Not out of fear but knowing that there's a high probability that if he is being touched right now, he may become overstimulated.

"I can't," Johnny chuckles with no humor, "I'm going to flip the fuck out. So, Simon, love, I'm taking Leah to the car. I need nicotine or something. Ma heid's mince. Vape still in the glove compartment?"

The headmaster then tries to scold, "Not on school grounds—"

"Awa' an bile yer heid!" He snaps before she can even finish, "That's enough out of you." Simon nods to him, signaling that yes it was in the glove compartment. So he storms out without even saying goodbye and makes his way over to his daughter, ignoring the office workers asking if he's alright. No. He's not.

She looks over at him as he scoops her up into his arms and walks out without a word thrown their way. He continues to walk through the halls of the school to the exit, trying to slow his breathing so he doesn't pop a fucking blood vessel. Leah frowns at him. "You're mad..." She whispers.

"Not at you," He informs, "Never at you. Start repeating those words that I taught you."

"I have been... Whenever he was mean to me I'd go into the bathroom and say it to myself..."

Johnny feels his rage starting to melt away into some angry mix of despair, heartbreak, and guilt. Some part of him feels like maybe he should've done more to prevent this in some type of way. He's not free from blame.

He should've questioned it more instead of just brushing it off as her grieving her mother and father. Should've come to the school himself. He should've done something. Anything. Then she wouldn't be in any

type of pain and one less trauma to add onto her list. Bullying. Leah is such an angel. Why her? What has she ever done to deserve any of this? He knows kids are mean but he always hoped that she or any of their kids would never have to experience any of this. Part of him feels as if he failed.

He opens the door to the parking lot and walks outside, the nearing winter air hitting against his face numbing the spiraling of his brain. Cold. It works.

As if Leah could read his mind, a tiny hand rests on his chin, making him look at her. "Dad," She starts, "It's not your fault."

That breaks his heart all over again.

"It's not yours, either, Leah. Repeat those words for me."

She smiles as he focuses his attention onto the parking lot again. "I'm strong, I'm beautiful, and I'm kind."

Simon crosses his arms, glaring head on at the headmaster with a dangerous tenseness in his stance. As if he himself was about ready to pounce. See, he understood exactly how his boyfriend had felt at hearing that huge reveal of: Hey you know how your daughter has been acting weird? Well, she's been getting bullied and we just didn't tell you.

He feels it too. The only difference is that he has spent years with anger being the only thing that fueled his being so it's a feeling that he's acquainted with. It's a part of him. Therefore, during times like this where he just wants to put his fist through the wall he knows how to contain it a bit better. He's glad that Johnny doesn't know what that's like.

After he had stormed out, Ava also had left with her boy. Patrick. Fucking brat. Up until this moment, he had actually liked the headmaster but that's hard to continue to do after hearing about what she did. Now he hates her. "You're letting a boy terrorize her and you're just telling us now? Why? Because the damage was noticeable to the naked eye this time?"

Mrs. Johnson hardens her gaze as she says, "Well, sometimes, when little boys like a girl they'll tease her—"

His heart drops. As the words left her mouth, he felt a cloud take over his mind. Images of his mother kissing up to his father after the things that he had just done to her. The fresh bruises on her cheek and split lip pulled into a scared smile as she rubbed her thumb along his clear skin. The blond's blood runs cold.

"Hold on. Did you tell her that?" Simon demands. He's seething now. It's unbelievable that adults are still teaching young girls that rhetoric in the year of 2023 because everyone knows that it's simply not true. It's a power trip. That's all it ever is. Even if it is a crush, that's not what he wants Leah to settle for. Ever. Not in a million years. It only normalizes the thought that men are mean when they love you. Then once they get older... He's experienced first hand what that does. That's not love.

"Well yeah," She defends, "Boys are tricky with their emotions—"

He cuts her off, "I'm going to stop you right there because now I'm going to have to go home and undo that whole mess of a bullshit life lesson you gave her on that somehow. And I'll tell you, I really don't appreciate that."

He feels a bit crazed. Images of his mother had turned into Leah in his brain now and feels physically ill. Who does this lady think she is?

She snaps her mouth shut. As he steps forward, she sits up straighter. He places two hands on her desk, continuing, "Tell me something. If your friend came into this office right now to tell you that her husband, boyfriend, or whatever, is mistreating her. Could you look her in the eyes and tell her confidently that he's doing that because he just loves her too much?"

"No," Mrs. Johnson does have the decency to look guilty as she answers, breaking eye contact with him.

"Exactly. So don't ever tell it to a little girl. You're an educator, you should know about how things learned in childhood effect adult life. You make them think that now, it destroys their ideas on how the people that should care about them treat them in the future. Those words should've never come from your mouth and I never want to find out that they do again or so help me I'll have your childcare licensed revoked."

She nods, swallowing. He continues, "Alec is going to be here in next year now. I want to have confidence that they'll be safe and protected in your care. You didn't show me or Johnny that today. Multiple

times. Who knows, we may still even pull them from this school. I don't know what he wants to do but my trust in you and your ability to handle situations correctly is gone."

He pushes off the desk, making his way to the door. She lets out a breath of relief as he goes to leave her in her misery of not one, not two, but three parents calling her out on her bullshit today. He may hate Ava but he has to thank her for standing up for them when it mattered the most. His hand freezes on the door knob, turning to the woman. He growls, "If something like this happens again, I'm am for sure pulling them from your school and I will be going to your bosses. I'm not a man of empty promises. No harm will come to *my* kids."

The words are out before he even realizes that he's said them. It's the first time that he's ever really called them his kids out loud and he hates that it had to be under these circumstances. He's not focused on that, though, as he storms out of the office and slams her door on the way out. The blinds bang against the window loudly. All personnel turn to look at him with wide eyes. He doesn't even spare them a glance as he states, "Leah won't be in school tomorrow. She's taking a personal day. I'll have an excused note on your desks by Monday morning."

—

"Can we go see Alec before my haircut?" Leah asks, looking up from her dolls that they had brought for her as a comfort. Johnny exchanges a glance with Simon before turning back and paying attention to the road again. There was an approval in the man's eyes.

"Aye," Soap answers, "He can't come with us, though. We kind of want to spend some alone time with you and talk about what happened today, alright?"

They've already texted Gaz and Callie about what had happened in which they agreed that they'd go pick up Alec later if need be. They'll also be keeping Sophie until they're ready. Johnny doesn't want to have to worry about any of the other kids while trying to have a serious conversation with Leah. Later tonight, him and Si need to have a talk also about whether or not they want to continue to send Leah there.

The whole reason why Anna had stayed in their home town is because she knew that this school system was good learning wise. It was what she wanted for them. Even if she's no longer here, that still matters to

Johnny. Deeply. But this? Today has been absolute hell.

When Simon had told him what had happened after they left, he had felt nothing but absolute dread. He doesn't want his daughter to be taught that people who are mean to her are that way because they love her; especially not after they try their hardest to show the kids a healthy home life and a healthy relationship between their parents. All four of them. Simon and Johnny. Anna and Chris. They've luckily never known anything other than that and he doesn't want any of that to change. Ever.

Ever since then, there's been a lingering heaviness on Simon and he seemed to be in a deep debate in his head. Johnny would give anything to know what he's thinking. Every time they make eye contact and do that wordless conversation thing they do though, his partner looks away in a silent refusal to talk about it.

When Alec sees Leah, he frowns. "What happened?" She reaches over and pulled him into a tight hug in which he returned, comforting his older sister. It reminds Johnny a lot of how his siblings were growing up. Sometimes, you just need their support. The daycare teacher awes at the kids.

"He cut my hair," She breathes sadly once they separate. Their fathers blink at the way that she hadn't used any names or descriptions, just a little simple sentence as if her brother would know.

He yells out, "Patrick?"

Oh.

He did know.

The conversation that Johnny had with Leah so long ago, he had mentioned talking to someone about what she was going through and *had* suggested Alec but he didn't think that she would have. With further reflection, though, it makes sense. Those two have been through more together than most other siblings. For a part of his closure therapy, he had read the police report after Dr. Gerber had suggested it and had come to find out that Leah had been the one that made sure her siblings got out alive. She got them out.

She was also the one that found both of her parents dead and refused to let Alec see that. That one was something that the kid's therapist

had informed him of, worried about the effect it could have on her in the future.

"Aye," She responds to her brother, sadly. Alec looked up at Simon and Soap, a questioning look in his eyes. It was like when he usually asks for permission to do something but in all honesty, they're both a bit exhausted from how the day has spiraled and aren't really too sure of what he's asking. So, they don't confirm or deny him.

Big fucking mistake on their end.

It's an hour or two later when Alec and his class are walking through the hallway for a bathroom break when he sees him. Patrick. The boy's mom had come to pick up her other son, one that the Mactavish kid is good friends with on a usual day to day basis but he had been ignoring today. He has to be loyal to his sister.

Patrick is stood besides his mother, arms crossed in a bratty manner as he pouts to himself like the course of actions he had taken were anyone's fault but his own. At least, Alec thinks he's bratty. If he had an attitude like that after getting in trouble for doing something wrong, his dads would for sure sit him down and talk to him about how he needs to accept responsibility for his mistakes. The only person he has to be mad at is himself and to use that energy to improve himself so that way next time, when the opportunity presents itself, he'll choose the better path.

He doesn't feel like choosing the better path this time. His brain thinks of the countless nights when their dads were getting dinner ready and Leah would tearfully tell her little brother about everything that's going on at school. How he had specifically told his friend that his older brother isn't allowed at his party because he wants his sister to have fun too.

So, Alec decides to beat up a boy two years older than him. The one terrorizing his sister. Just like his dad used to do for his mom and how she used to do that for him. Just like his father who has passed used to do for his own siblings. He's just performing his duty as brother.

Ava grabs the sign out sheet. She's too busy talking to desk worker about the days events, pulling at her hair as she does so, to notice Alec slipping out of line. He walks quietly, focus zeroed in on the kid as his fists clench in his jean pockets. Once within enough distance, he taps Patrick's shoulder and when the brat finally turns around, he socks

him as hard as he can.

Johnny's phone rings for the second time that day. Simon grabs it, tilting his head at the caller ID before flashing it to his boyfriend that was currently driving. "It's the daycare," The blond explains.

And that's how they ended up with two of their kids in the backseat. One with bruised knuckles and a pleased smirk on his face, one with a brand new haircut and puffy cheeks from spending a majority of the day crying. The technicalities on how to handle this situation are pretty damn hard to figure out. Simon had told Alec to only ever get physical with someone if it was to defend himself or others— and technically that is exactly what he did.

He couldn't help but experience a surge of pride after seeing Patrick with a bloody nose and a tooth missing when they came to pick up their son. Ava had glared at them. It was so worth it.

Plus add on the fact that the other little boy hadn't even been able to get one hit in? And he's two years older? And he's bigger? Simon can't *help* but be proud of his son for that as someone who used to train people to do that exact thing for a living. Johnny is leaning on the steering wheel, hand covering his mouth that had been pulled into its own smile. "Alec, you can't— you really shouldn't," The brunet struggles.

The child listens patiently. Then, when he realizes that the adults can't really find a way to talk to him about this, he whines smugly, "Come on, I totally kicked his ass. You have to admit it."

Simon and Johnny both look back at him with wide eyes for a moment. They turn to each other, matching expressions of shock on their features until the Scot slowly realizes that he still has to drive the damn car. So they both opt to watch the road. The cocky expression flashes in Simon's brain as the blond sneaks a glance at his partner. It looked just like Johnny's. Sounded like something he'd say. In that specific tone.

He can see the exact millisecond that Soap has the same revelation. Simon is the first to crack. He really tried to fight it but the humor of the whole situation proved to be too strong as a huff of amusement sputters past his lips, forming into full fledged laughter. Pretty soon

after that, the whole car is hysterics.

They brush off the shitshow of the by cackling loudly at how stupid Patrick had looked wailing on the ground, a tooth in his hand with blood pouring out of his nose and mouth while Alec stood off in the corner; his own lips pulled up in gratification. A four year old beating up a six year old. Not just any six year old either, a bully who tries to hurt others to make themselves feel better. "We gotta get picture or something and post it online with the caption," Johnny states between laughs, "'Baby's first fistfight.' He's a proper Mactavish now. God, my Da' will be so proud."

"We're doing such a good job, Johnny," Simon heaves, wiping a tear from his eye. Leah giggles at that. At least their son isn't picking on little girls for no reason and is instead beating up the ones that do, so maybe they are doing something right.

—

After they got home, Johnny had taken Alec into the kitchen to grab some frozen vegetables from the freezer and put it onto the forming bruises. Meanwhile, Simon sat Leah down in the room. He had thought of how he was going to approach this conversation since he had left the school and the only way he could think to do it was by being totally honest.

His daughter watches him have an eternal war, even now when he's concluded that this is his talk to have with her. She sits on the coffee table, patiently waiting. "Alright, Leah," He starts, holding out his hands. Her little ones slide into his as she senses that this is going to be a really serious one.

He felt bile in his throat while he gently holds her hands. Being a father. Telling his daughter what to expect in life when it comes to things like how someone who cares about you should treat you; even if he was never taught that lesson.

He was being a dad. It really sinks into him at this time that that's exactly who he is now. Someone who passes down life lessons that they've learned over time to the little one who follows his every step blindly, a big smile on her face and small feet slapping the floor in some attempt to catch up to him while he looks back at her with a huge grin. A father. That must include tough conversations like this.

"You remember when Mrs. Johnson had told you that the reason why Patrick was being mean to you was because he had a crush on you?"

Simon asks. Leah hums an affirmative and nods as she does so, expression completely open. He continues "Well that's not entirely true... It's not true at all actually..."

"When someone cares about you, especially in that sense, they're not going to mistreat you in any way shape or form. Also, personally I think you are far too young to even be having conversations like who has a crush on you but that's besides the point—"

He holds her hands tighter, shaking them slightly to really make sure she understands, "That is not how you should ever expect to be treated by someone who cares about you. He did not care about you. He wanted to feel bigger than what he really was so he used your pain to do that. Do you understand?"

The little girl nods again, staring down at her feet. Simon lets go of one her hands before using his pointer finger on her chin to make her look up at him as tears started to form in her eyes again. Admittedly, his were glassy too. "I love you so much. You are my whole world," He tells her, desperately. And it's true. They are his whole world.

She nods along in understanding. His voice cracks when he speaks again, "I never want you to think that that was normal behavior. When I was growing up, my father was a mean man and I just don't want you to ever have to encounter someone like that in your lifetime."

Leah looks at him in bewilderment. Simon starts to rack over everything he just said and tries to find the exact moment where he had lost her as this was an important lesson for her. Luckily, she supplies him some clarity, "Grandpa Price?"

"No," He immediately corrects, "No, no, no that man would never hurt a fly, Leah."

That man has killed countless people.

He winces a bit at his own wording there, knowing that he had just flat out lied about that. But it's not like he can tell his daughter what Price does for a living. Especially not now. Some part of his heart warms at the realization that Leah had thought that the captain was his father because he really does view him as such. She interrogates, "Then who?"

"My father that raised me. My birth father, Leah," He tells her, "He was a very bad man. Completely rubbish. I don't want you to..." He

can't finish the sentence. His own mouth had betrayed him by snapping shut before he could say it.

Nonetheless, a flash of sympathetic understanding comes onto her face as she concludes, "Go through what you did?"

It felt like a punch in the gut. Like a crisp slap to the face. The fact that she had put the rest of it together without really any hint of what he was about to say next is proof of how ingrained in this family he has become. Yet again, he hears the tiny feet padding against the floor aggressively as she tries to catch up to him in his metaphor from earlier. This time however, he stops and waits as he points to something in the distance. A new lesson ahead of them.

All he can do is nod his head. She mimics the action and mumbles back, "You don't treat Dad bad. Or us."

"And that's what you should expect. Always."

Without warning, she throws her arms around his neck tightly and Simon feels a breath of relief leave him. She got it. The teachings of Mrs. Johnson were hopefully undone by him sharing his own personal experience in life. He wraps his arms around her and closes his eyes, allowing himself to finally let that anxiety that had been clutching onto him go.

She then whispers to him, "He may not have loved you, Daddy. But we do. We know you love us too and I'll always remember that."

He feels a part of him break and heal at the same time.

Milestones

Chapter Summary

Sophie is the love of our lives

Chapter Notes

Hey :D I hope you enjoy this chapter. A little short bc it was wee woo day (9-1-1 fandom sound off) but ur gonna like it nonetheless.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Riley!”

Simon turns from his spot on the couch, watching Riley come around the archway at the speed of lightning before Johnny bolts after him slightly hobbling. The dog runs around the coffee table, barreling right towards Sophie, who was standing there giggling at the scene and blissfully unknowing of what it means when an animal is coming at you full speed.

And it’ll stay that way.

The blond lunges forwards, whisking his daughter off of the ground and leaning back with her safe in his arms just as Riley tramples over where she had just been standing a moment ago. “Fuckin’ hell,” He mumbles.

Johnny jumps over the other couch and tries to grab at the German Shepherd but all that he manages to do is get dragged onto the floor with a loud thump, slamming his arm on the coffee table.

Simon can only stare wide eyed. He has no bloody idea what the fuck is going on right now. They were just having a peaceful Wednesday, getting ready to leave so that his boyfriend could go to his therapy appointment and Sophie, her haircut. Now suddenly their dog, and Simon’s boyfriend on top of it, has lost their fucking minds. He blinks.

“Damn dog!” The Scot growls, glaring up at the ceiling before hitting the floor with closed fists multiple time. The other man reaches out to him. However, before Simon can even begin to ask him What’s going on, Johnny’s off again.

He calls after him, “Love, what in the bloody fuckin’ hell is going on?”

He stands, placing Sophie into a sitting position on the couch and chases after the two into the kitchen. He finds Soap standing there, squatting with his hands outstretched and in clawing position with fingers flexing. There a deep concentration on his face, eyes focused and bottom lip jutted out into a slight pout.

When he registers that his boyfriend is there, Johnny makes a quick shooing motion. Simon freezes in his spot, flicking his eyes over to Riley. The dog had lowered his fore quarters to the floor, back into the air and his tail wagging wildly. In his mouth was a shoe— the matching one that Soap was currently wearing on his foot. It was the first time that it had come to his attention that his boyfriend wasn’t wearing a pair of shoes rather just one and a sock. He’s quickly able to form what’s happening.

A smile finds it’s way onto his face as he brings up a hand to cover his mouth, attempting to hide any sounds of amusement threatening to come out. The dog and his partner are staring each other down as if this was some type of western style movie. If Simon focused enough, he could hear that duel tune.

Johnny jumps forwards. Instead of grabbing onto the shoe he tumbles face first onto the hardwood floor again. Riley scrambles away and Simon stops him mid run, scooping him up off the floor with ease. He turns to look over at the Scot.

“What the hell?” Soap groans. He blinks once or twice before staring at the blond with wide eyes. The former lieutenant wrestles the dog sneaker from the dogs mouth before holding it up.

“Looking for this love?”

“Simon,” He breathes in relief, “I could marry you right now if you asked.”

That statement makes Simon’s heartbeat flutter in his chest. Like a bunch of butterflies’ wings were brushing against his heart as they flew about within the organ. He knew that his face had turned a shade of red as he set the dog down on the floor, not looking up even as the damned thing ran off to play with his chew toy. His lips turned up into a shy smile.

He hears more than sees the sound of Johnny making his way over to him, a palm guiding his face away from the ground so that he could

properly look at his boyfriend. Brown is met with the prettiest shade of blue. Like an ocean.

A pair of lips attaches to his own. Kissing Johnny is like taking a breath of air for Simon. Each and every time it sends sparks down his spine, as if it was the first time they ever kissed all over again. He doesn't think it'll ever grow old, not even when they do. He memorizes how those lips feel against his own, hoping that when he leaves this earth he could take that feeling with him and make his last moments the thing that makes him happiest.

Price tells him all the time that Soap has him whipped. That he never pictured Ghost as a man that could even begin to speak the way that he does about Johnny and what loving him feels like. Loving Johnny is beautiful.

Soap pulls away. He's always the first to pull away. Because honestly, if it were up to Simon, he would drown in those kisses. "Thank you, mo leannan..."

"Anything for you, love. You know that."

"Aye," Johnny chuckles, "That I do, Simon. That I do."

He steps away, gently taking the shoe from his hands and leaning over to slip it onto his foot. He uses a hand gripped onto Simon's shoulder to steady him in the process. It's so domestic. And Johnny is so beautiful, even doing normal human things like putting on articles of clothing. Although, he does quite enjoy watching him take them off as well...

Yeah, whipped is probably the best descriptor for what he is. After he's all set to go, the brunet nods as he beams up at Simon in a way that always makes him so weak in the knees.

He wants to marry him.

If you got it, you need to put a ring on it. It was something that Laswell told him some time ago with a gentle touch on his shoulder. "You're not getting any younger, Ghost," she'd say.

Neither is Johnny. They'll only continue to grow old from here as they leave behind a past of pain and suffering, now settling in this big old for the rest of their lives until they eventually die. There is no breaking up. Sure, Simon might not be able to tell the future but this is who he wants to be with for the rest of his life and nothing will ever

change that. Even if John decides one day that he's had enough of him, he'll try to fix it too his best ability and hope to God that its mendable.

Sophie's haircut can wait. There's a new plan for the day.

"Si?" A gentle voice mumbles. He snaps back to reality to see that blinding, amused grin again with crows feet in the corner of sapphire eyes. Johnny asks, "Where did you go?"

"Nowhere, love. I'm right here. You ready to go?"

His partner narrows his eyes at him, mouth now in a slight suspicious pout. Simon just smiles back. The other man leans forward, placing a chaste kiss on the blond's cheek with a content sigh before going around him, saying, "I'm ready. Lets just get—"

He stops abruptly once at the archway, body as stiff as a board. Alarm courses through the taller's veins as he follows him, heart beginning to pick up at the way that he had completely frozen. Once there, Simon mimics the action. "Sophie..." Soap finishes, dumbly.

The little girl is standing up from a crawling position, wobbling back and forth as she snaps her gaze up to her fathers and lets out a delighted squeal upon seeing them. She claps her hands. The kid must've been trying to get tho them after he had left her on the cushion to help out Johnny. Speaking of him.

Simon hears the sound of him sucking in a breath, reaching out and clutching the front of his boyfriend's t-shirt for some reason. Probably in a form of anticipation. But they're to focused Sophie to notice.

That stare at their daughter with matching faces of suspense as she clutches her hands together in a cute fold, bringing it up to her chest. No one breathes. No one moves. His gut is tilting in whirling in a way that makes him feel as if a rock was sitting deep in his stomach. "You gon' do it, Soph?" Simon asks.

They've been in this exact situation many times over. Where they both think that she's finally going to walk —. since she's a little late to doing that— but the poor kid always ends up falling on her butt instead. Each time they tell her she is did good anyways.

But right now is different. There's this shining determination in her orbs. She steadies. Her hands unclasp from each other, now formed into grabby hands as she repeatedly giggles, "Da Da Da."

When her shaking leg moves, Simon's convinced that he could pass out. The grip on his shirt tightens. "Steamin' Jesus," Soap mutters.

The foot plants down on the floor. Then another. And another. This goes on until she's eventually standing right in front of them, wrapping her arms around Johnny's leg with a loud scream of, "Da!"

Sophie just took her first steps. The disbelief shocks him to his core as they both at once start loudly praising her with the Scot picking her up and letting out a, "I'm so proud of you right now." She laughs at him before grabbing at his cheeks, squishing them together as she places a kiss on his forehead in response.

Simon's heart could melt. It feels so incredibly full right now as he looks at her from over Johnny's shoulder with an open mouthed smile.

"Look at you!" He states, "Getting too big on us, kid."

They allow themselves to be late leaving for Johnny's appointment, too busy with praising their child. It's quite daunting, actually, watching a kid that you've helped raised basically since she first got here slowly make all of those big first milestones. Sure, she was John's sister's but the woman had sadly passed a week or two after she had come to this world and Simon came into the child's life at only one month of age.

It really makes him wonder about how complicated it'll be once she gets older. All of the kids have made themselves their children by asserting the fact that Simon and Johnny are their fathers. But for Sophie, it'll always be on the more complex side. Alec and Leah will always remember their parents that had passed, the youngest MacTavish won't. As she gets older, that is glaringly clear. She doesn't experience the same things that her older siblings do. There is no sitting up at night in one of the men's arms, assuring them that she loves them but wishes she still had her bio parents too.

That's a conversation they have with Leah often. They tell her all the time that no matter what, she belonged to the other couple first and that they will never be upset at her for wanting them here. Alec too. His panic attacks get triggered by the idea of abandonment and death.

Sophie experiences none of these things. All that she knows is them. Maybe there's a faint memory of her other parents in her mind, but that will fade more and more as time goes on. The only thing she'll know them by one day is the stories that the other MacTavish family members carry close to their hearts and the pictures tucked away

safely in photo albums.

Simon views all of the kids as his. He loves them dearly and equally. But he has to recognize that for Sophie, she'll always feel a little different than Alec or Leah and that breaks his heart.

Still, he allows himself to appreciate the milestones. They tug at your heart strings, reminding you that time is slipping past you at a rate that you can't stop or slow down. They're all getting older. Leah, Sophie's, and his birthdays are all soon. Then they'll be right back to Alec, starting over the rotation as they all slowly but quickly get older together.

It never feels like enough time. And he worries everyday about it getting cut short somehow just like it had been for these kids once before.

—

"Your father is going to kill me but I'm hoping that this will make it up to him," Simon sighs, readjusting Sophie on his hip as they both stare at the shiny rings, "You're supposed to be getting a haircut but I promise this is a lot more fun."

"Ooh!" Sophie says, pointing at a spiral. It's a thin band with a huge diamond on the top, it glows radiantly against the case's white lights.

"Yeah, not that one," He grumbles, "Daddy can't afford all that. Plus, he'd be confused about why I got him such a thin band. He likes bulkier rings, love. Burrows into his skin less."

The girl turns to him, eyebrows pointing down to her nose in offense before she points to herself. "Me," She informs him. There's an offended edge into her tone, as if Simon was an idiot for thinking about the person that they came here for rather than her.

At least she knows the word "me" now.

"Not for Sophie. For dad."

"Me."

Have they been spoiling her? Absolutely. Was he ready for what that means in the long run? No. Is he going to continue to spoil the hell out of her and the other kids? You bet your fucking ass, he will. Only the best for them.

But maybe not a ring that's worth more than his own life is. That might just be where the line may have to be drawn. "No," Simon can't help but chuckle, "Dad. I know they're really shiny and pretty but we are here for Dad. I'll tell you what, I'll let you pick out his ring with me. Huge emphasize on the 'his.' Alright?"

She huffs out and he figures that's the closest that he'll get to some form of backing down from wanting her own jewelry. He continues looking through the case. Why does this feel like the hardest thing he's ever done in his life? He's killed people yet somehow shopping for a ring to propose to the love of his life with feels like the most complicated decision ever in his life. Johnny had said that he wanted the proposal to be romantic.

He already has some ideas on how to do that. For example, he's going to propose on January 1st, the very first day of the year so that they can remember that as the date that they got engaged every time a new year starts. That's romantic right? But it's only September and that's so far away. He doesn't want Johnny to beat him to it. Even though it's unlikely that that man is even thinking about this type of stuff, considering he's been so focused on what to do in his upcoming future.

He has kind of ran out of time. They agreed to go back to work once Sophie can walk, which as of today has just started occurring. That's the last big milestone until the first tooth is lost.

A worker comes around. She holds herself in a very distinguished manner, hair falling from her head in waves with a soft look graced across her features. "How can I help you today? Shopping for the missus? The future missus, perhaps?" She jests lightly.

"Future mister, actually," He corrects, adjusting the mask on his nose.

The woman places a hand on her chest, looking genuinely horrified by her own assumption. Simon's not too bothered about it. He's experienced worse than that after being in the military so a little misunderstanding after he's quite literally just lingered on the woman's selection (Sophie's fault) doesn't bother him too deeply.

"I'm sorry," She apologizes, "How presumptuous of me."

"It's alright."

She lets out a breath of relief. Then, gestures for him to follow her over to the men's section with a wide grin on her face. Once they're

standing in front of that selection, he feels even more overwhelmed. All of these are ones that Johnny would like. He knows it.

He lets out a puff of air, anxiety flaring in his chest while Sophie waves to the employee. She gets delighted when she receives reciprocation, smiling but hiding her face in Simon's shoulder shyly. "Your daughter is adorable," She compliments, "Truly. That's the most smiliest baby I've seen come in here. Usually they're bored out of their mind."

Simon huffs in amusement at that, "Thank you. Apparently she likes how shiny the jewelry is. Tried to argue with me that we were here for her and that she was the one being bought something. Plus, she's really good with people. Gets that from her father."

"The stubbornness from you, then?"

"Oh no," He jokes, "That's from him too."

She lets out a laugh, shaking her head. Sophie sits up, leaning forwards until she's practically straining in the blond's grip as she lets out another, "Oooh." He feels bad about the little finger smudges that are left on the glass considering that this worker is likable and will have to be the one that cleans it.

However, she seems to not mind. "Pretty right?" She asks, causing Sophie to cheer some babbles at her. Then, whips around.

"Dada, me!" She claps, "Me!"

It's at that moment that he realizes that all those times where she will repeat "Da" repeatedly were actually her calling him "Dada" and Soap "Da." The sentiment causes his heart to swell and he almost folds into the idea of buying her a bracelet or something. Almost.

He lets out an exhale, shooting the employee an "I-told-you-so" expression. "Sophie, we are here for Dad," He reminds her patiently, "Say it with me. Dad."

She looks at him. Blinks. Then suddenly reaches forwards to pull on his mask, as she sometimes decides to do in an attempt to piss him off after he pissed her off. Sometimes, Soph is a little too smart for her age. Because that is something that can send him over the edge into annoyed territory fairly quickly, even with his best efforts. Ever since she discovered this, she's been doing it. He pulls her hand away. "Dad," He says sternly.

“Da,” She sighs, slumping in his arms.

Maybe he should feel bad about the fact that he had won the argument against a baby. But he doesn't. It's his child. He's allowed to feel pride when he doesn't fold into her temper tantrums.

The worker doesn't seemed bothered by the squabble either. Instead she redirects both of their attention with a question of, “Do you know what color you're thinking? We'll start with that.”

“I don't know,” He replies, scratching at his neck, “I was considering gold but I'm not too sure.”

She perks up, “What's his skin tone?”

“He's tan with a sort of warm undertone. I thought gold may look great against that but..”

She seems to consider this for a moment before leaning down and bringing out the exact opposite of what he had just said. She places the sliver rings on the counter. He's about to ask but the woman cuts him off, “Silver would probably stand out better. Gold jewelry would look better aesthetic wise but it would blend kind of. You want that baby to be noticeable to others.”

Well, one things for certain. He wants that thing to be the first thing that people notice whenever they try to come up and flirt with him—Which is something that happens quite often, especially with the PTA moms. Especially Ava. Not as much anymore but Simon can still hear the slight flirtatious tone in her voice sometimes whenever she speaks to *his* boyfriend.

Highlight on the his.

Now, look. Simon is perfectly aware of how possessive he can be over Johnny. It's no secret. It's something he should probably be ashamed of but can't bring himself to be when the ladder is so much worse than him. When the former sergeant gets flirted with, he puts an arm around him and glares threateningly at whoever the offender is as that voice yelling “mine” in his head gets louder and louder. It's a bad habit.

But Johnny? Johnny is so much worse. He'll visibly bristle and then cut conversation short, pulling a very amused Simon behind him in the process. Then, as soon as they're away from the public eye and children, he'll practically jump him and will kiss him so harshly that

the blond's head would grow a mixed of concerned and fuzzy with arousal. It doesn't matter if it's the car in the parking lot of the grocery store or in their home once the kids are asleep. He'll let his jealousy push him to the edge. Not that Simon's complaining. It's not for everyone but something about the Scot being that possessive over him makes him feeling as if he's floating.

Still. Johnny's worse than him in that regard. Doesn't mean he's not going to buy the damn ring that catches everyone's eye. He has to talk himself out of buying a band with a huge diamond on it, knowing Johnny prefers simplicity because of his remodeling.

He ends up picking a silver one that has a thin tungsten line in the middle.

—

Johnny stares at him in confusion. He points to their daughter, interrogating, "Hair?"

"Didn't do it," Simon dodges, buckling her into her car seat. She's now passed out from the eventful hour of ring shopping, so luckily she didn't snitch on him and would probably forget what they had done earlier by the time she's awake. Thank God for children and their short attention spans.

"I can't see that," He responds, "But why?"

The other man closes her in before rotating himself around to face the questioning stare of his partner with an easy grin. He leans back on the door, answering, "Went to the playground instead." Simon shrugs. This causes the other man to step closer into his space, squinting his eyes at him and he can't help that it causes a laugh to bubble out of his throat. He's onto him, for sure.

"No," Johnny chides, "You didn't. I can see the playground from my office."

Oh, yeah. He's onto him. The only course of action now is to try and figure out why he'd lie about his lie without telling him the truth. Easy. Simple. It's not like Johnny knows him better than anyone ever has in his whole entire life. Not at all. "It's a surprise, love," He breathes.

That seems to work a little as he leans backwards, arms crossing over his chest. "What kind of surprise?" He interrogates.

Simon steps forwards, grabbing his face before saying softly, “One that you don’t get to know about yet.” He then leans down to place a gentle kiss on his forehead before separating and making his way into the passenger side of the car, leaving Soap standing there.

“I want to know! Hey, Simon—Tell me!” He calls after him.

Just as Simon told the jewelry shop employee, stubborn. But he loves it that way. That’s why he’s going to marry that man as soon as he gets the chance.

Chapter End Notes

I hear ur comments about Simon deserving a heartfelt proposal himself and would like to say: I see you and I hear you and I love you. I have plans that I can’t share right now bc the haters will sabotage me

Anyways i was on my private twt and saw someone comment on codtwts acc that they could tell I used to be a writer for buddie because they could see it in the way I wrote soapghost and I just want whoever that was to know that you saying that has haunted me in a way that I’ve never been haunted before. /nm /pos

I still think about it and it’s been like a week. I wanted so bad to comment back to that person and be like OH GOD

anyways. I’ve been thinking about getting a twt bc ppl talk about this fic on there but admittedly I don’t like twt fandoms too much. Had some trauma in them :D so :D but I want to interact with everyone that reads it on all platforms.

If you ever make art about this fic please comment ur @ or a link to it. I’ll enjoy it thoroughly. I’m admittedly not too active on many social media sites but if you let me know it exists I’ll give you the appreciation you deserve.

Much love to you darlings. I appreciate you so much and can’t believe the traction that this fic has gotten. I’m so grateful. You have no idea

Fears

Chapter Summary

Simon and Johnny deal with a whole new problem in their own relationship that causes both of them to spiral in their own ways. One worst than the other.

Therapy is had. Dr. Gerber saves the day again.

They heal.

Chapter Notes

tw // past child abuse

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Johnny was stressed to no end. The kids have been fighting nonstop, including Sophie now that she's gotten older. It didn't help that Simon was standing there awkwardly the whole time, not seeming to know what to do. This is an ongoing habit with him and it annoys the Scot to no end, if he's honest. But he doesn't hold it against him. It's only whenever discipline really has to be cracked down on the kids.

Today, though, he does lose his temper. Leah just shoved Sophie aside to grab a toy, Alec is on the couch wailing with crossed arms, Riley is barking, and Simon is standing there with wide eyes at the chaos. He feels his chest tightening and the world seems to be a bit too loud, moving too quickly. The colors are starting to look a bit too bright against his eyes and he is starting to be able to feel every single thread in all of his clothes.

He wants to walk away but he knows that if he does, nothing will get resolved. He feels the pull on his scalp from his unsteady fists, not entirely sure of when he had made the decision rip at the hair on his head.

There's just way too much going on at once. He feels as if he can't keep up and is drowning in it all. Simon is frozen and the dog is fucking barking and the kids are fighting and— "Alright!" Soap snaps, voice echoing against the walls, "Everyone stop! Just stop!"

The whole room falls into a heavy silence as everyone turns to stare at him in surprise. It was the loudest that he has ever yelled before in

this household and once everything starts to dim down a bit, the guilt settles in. He feels like he could cry. The stress and the frustration are still bubbling underneath his skin and although everything calmed, he can't help but feel a bit frazzled still.

Deep breaths in. Deep breaths out- Why the fuck is his shirt feeling so God damn itchy? He can feel every hair sprouting on his skin and he has to scratch at it as if it were bugs. Fuckin' hell.

The kids didn't deserve that. They've never heard him scream like that before and he knows how scary that can sound to them. It's not like he said anything bad but just the way his tone had sounded at that moment... fuck.

"Okay," He says, sticking out a shaking hand, "I'm sorry for yelling. Too much was happening at once and I lost it. I shouldn't do that, ever. That's not the type of household we live in. You didn't deserve that."

Leah and Alec look at the ground in shame while Sophie pushes herself up onto her feet, waddling over to him with a, "Da." She grabs at the shaking hand, just holding it there for a moment while she looks up at him with her big blue eyes. It's almost as if she's apologizing in her own way.

He feels the tears start to prick at the corner of his eyes. Yelling at everyone was something that he hated doing, especially that loudly. The guilt that he's facing for this will probably be a topic for the next three months in therapy. "I'm sorry, Dad," Leah mumbles.

"No, sweetie," He swallows, "It's alright. I really shouldn't have lost my temper."

It's going to be hard to punish her now. However, it still needs to be done solely for the fact that she had shoved one of her siblings yet again and it happened to be the baby this time. Sophie could've gotten really hurt. "Can you do me a favor, love? Could you go up to your room for timeout. You can't push your siblings and I have made that perfectly clear multiple times now so now there's going to have to be actual consequences. I'll be up to talk about that in a bit. I just need a moment to get my head on straight."

He can feel Simon eyes on him in the background but he's still unable to look at him. Soap knows that this time, they may end up having to actually talk or argue over this. He hates when they have to do that. But it needs to stop. Johnny is so tired of having to play bad cop

during times like this. The blond is good at so many other things when it comes to raising children but discipline is not one of them and while he admires the patience he seems to have, he's not too sure if that's the reason.

He's not tough with them when he needs to be and sometimes Soap really needs him to be. He's not going to try and blame that outburst on him, though. That was entirely his fault and that's something that'll need to be worked on on his end so that it doesn't happen again. Having to be firm with your kids is normal. Yelling can be okay. But not out of anger with the venomous tone he had just had.

He feels like a terrible dad now.

Leah stands, making her way over to him. "Stop beating yourself up," She tells him, "We all make mistakes sometimes, Dad. You are strong and you're beautiful and you're smart, remember? Your actions don't define you. How you learn from them does."

Then she's off, crawling up the stairs on all fours while her father just stands there dumbly. How the hell did she become so well rounded? That's surely not from him and Simon, right? He blinks. He feels two hands clasp onto his shoulders, a comforting voice in his ear mumbling, "Go take a moment, love. You're shaking like a leaf."

All anger towards Simon dissipated in that moment. A gentle kiss is pressed on his temple and he closes his eyes at the sensation, allowing an exhale of relief to leave him. Afterwards he nods, pats Sophie's hand before letting go, and walks out the front door onto the deck. He doesn't say a word.

He makes his way over to the steps and crashes down onto him in a sitting position before burying his face into his hands. All of the frustration and guilt builds up into a ball before exploding, leaving him a sobbing mess. God, the kids and Simon didn't deserve that. Hell, not even the dog deserved it. He's never snapped like that before and he always held himself to a way higher standard then losing his cool and taking it out on them. Fuck. Simon should be so pissed at him.

He's probably in there comforting the kids now. What if they're scared of Soap after this? What if—

The door opens. The sound of heavy footsteps fill his ears before there's the feeling of body heat besides him. A hand wraps around his shoulders followed by a tug into the chest of his boyfriend as a chin rests on his head. Johnny repositions himself, wrapping his arms

around Simon's middle and seeming that comfort that brings him back to earth every single time he breaks for just a moment. "You're alright, love. It's okay," His partner soothes.

All that he's able to choke out is an, "I'm sorry."

"None of that. You had a moment. We all understand. No one hates you. No one is mad at you."

"It wasn't," He pulls away, rubbing the heel of his palms into his eyes, "It wasn't like I had just yelled, Si. I completely lost it in there."

He feels a hands on his wrist, guiding the limbs away so that he can properly look at his boyfriend rather than starbursts. Then, his face is being cradled. The gentle touch releases the tightness in his chest a bit and allows him a moment of peace. "John," Simon starts firmly. And oh God, that really means that he's in for it. He's never been called 'John' once by this man in his whole life and the fact that it's happening now only solidifies that he is obviously very upset with him. He deserves it. That wasn't okay.

A gentleness passes over his partner's eyes, causing Johnny's brain to slightly malfunction at that moment. "Listen to me, it was just a moment. It's not like you're like that all of the time. You are constantly telling the kids that we all have times that we aren't proud of so you're going to need to apply that logic to yourself," He tells him.

Soap blinks. Once. Twice. Why wasn't he angry with him? As if being able to hear his thoughts, the man moves his to smooth down the unruly hair on top of Johnny's head from when he had tugged at it inside in a comforting manner. "You got overwhelmed. It happens."

Johnny lets the feelings finally go and he feels clear headed enough to say, "I'm solid."

"You sure?"

"Aye. I'm all good, Si."

He turns around to look inside the house from where Simon had left the door open, seeing Sophie and Alec play nicely as if nothing had happened. That's because it wasn't them. It was Leah that was the problem. Johnny feels hopeless at this point.

She's still a sweet little girl and has a heart of gold but it seems as if her temper just tends to be so short anymore. Then, she blows up and

acts out. Her therapist said that it most likely has something to do with how she feels as if she has no control over her life and Soap's not sure how to fix that. One thing he's sure of; bullying her little siblings certainly isn't the answer. He doesn't know how to get through to her. He's tried.

The worst part about it is she seems to wait until Soap is out of the room before doing it because she knows that Simon doesn't know how to properly discipline her. He's good at easy things like Sophie arguing with him or telling Alec to stop running around the house. They listen to that. It's the tantrums, the fighting, the physical altercations that he seems to struggle with and Soap just wishes he understood why. He's sure that it has something to do with his past in some way but it's still kind of frustrating when he is constantly the one that needs to be on top of things like actual discipline.

Part of him wonders if it's because he doesn't feel like an actual parental figure to the kids deep down— basically just the fun step dad. Which... hurts. Because he thought they were in this together but what if Simon doesn't want that full responsibility? He had mentioned in the past not wanting children. No one had questioned it, knowing that he was content living a life as Ghost.

So is there a possibility that this has been all one sided? He knows Simon loves him and loves the kids but what if that's not the life he wants and he's only staying here because of that love? He can't think about this right now. It'll destroy him when it's probably not even true. Just a result of his current state of mind and spiraling.

Still. Johnny has always thought that he wasn't the type to settle down with... No. Not now. He's not going to let that voice in the back of his head make him feel even worse.

But still, certain things need to change. The reason why Sophie won't stop pulling on his mask or will argue with him is because she knows that he won't give her any actual consequences if she doesn't listen. Babies are smart. Especially that baby.

But Johnny can't take it anymore. No resentment. That's what they agreed on. He can feel it already starting to build, even with his best attempts of being understanding.

He tears his eyes away from the children, focusing instead of the stone that leads to the driveway. A hesitance builds up inside of him and he doesn't know what to do with it. Somehow he feels like he's pushing

Simon but he also knows that if this continues happening, there's a possibility that slowly Johnny will start snapping more and more and resentment will build all around the family. Then, they could break.

No, they'd try couples therapy first with Dr. Gerber. That man is their lifeline honestly. Maybe they should start paying him more...

"Simon, can I ask you something?" He squeaks. He hates how weak his voice sounds. Soap clears his throat, rubbing at it as if that'll help get rid of the insecurity dripping into it.

"Anything, love."

He does turn to face Simon then. He loves this man wholeheartedly and he knows that they can get through this. The former lieutenant just need to let Johnny in. "Why don't you ever help with disciplining the kids?" He asks before breaking out into an explanation, "You're good at easy stuff but when it comes down to things like what just happened in the living room, I'm completely alone in that fight. I know that there's a good reasoning for it. But I do need help with that aspect sometimes..."

"Especially when we both start working. I know that you've helped me with so much and for that I'm grateful but I don't want to always be the bad cop that takes toys or puts them in timeout. That'll only make them have no respect towards either of us or our word in the end."

Simon doesn't respond, rather tenses up as a darkness clouds his brown, distant orbs. Concern washes over Soap as he sticks out a hand, gently placing it on his thigh before retracting it when the man jumps at the touch. The taller man stands up, making his way down the stairs to just stare out at the distance. Yeah. He shouldn't of asked.

He wants to help him somehow but doesn't quite know how. Johnny pushes himself upright, not making any other movements but simply standing there while watching his shoulders move up and down. There's a broken, "I can't."

"Simon—"

"No, Johnny. You don't understand," He turns around, eyes wild, "I can't. I'm too— I just— Him."

He was fully concerned now as he bounds down the stairs as quickly as possible towards his boyfriend that was now flinching at every single sound that rang against his ears. His main focus right now was

trying to calm the man down. "Who, love? What's going on? Where are you right now?"

"My dad," He rasps, "I can't be that man. I won't, Johnny. He's evil. Pure evil. And I can't—"

Soap watches Simon bring a hand up, brushing the scar that cuts into his lip and something akin to dread builds in his being. That combination was not something that he liked; not at all.

Cautiously, Johnny reaches out and places two palms on Simon's cheeks. At first he straightens his back into a painful line until the Scot brings him downwards to press their foreheads together in the way that they usually do to ground each other. Then he relaxes. He watches the blond close his eyes, letting out a shaky exhale through his nose. "Alright," Johnny whispers, "Alright, Si. It's okay. You're safe. You don't have to, I'll take care of it I promise. I didn't know. I'm sorry."

He's suddenly being pulled flush against his body as Simon hugs him tightly, burying his face into Johnny's neck to the best of his ability with his height. Soap should've known it was a trauma response. That man has so many skeletons that it makes a graveyard look docile. Now that he knows, he'll try his best not to let his own frustrations get to him and will simply understand that this may be one of the things that he will have to do alone.

Relationships are about compromise and he won't let his own annoyances be something that sends his partner back to wherever he had just gone.

He's not sure what Simon's father did but based on that little action of running his fingers along his mouth scar... And the way he was shot up like the room— Well, porch— was on fire? He can understand.

—

"He needs my help and when he asked for it, I panicked."

Dr. Gerber nods along, setting down his notebook as he always does whenever a particularly serious conversation comes up. Simon has gotten better with therapy. Sure, he still takes almost the full hour to open up about things but he's at least finding ways to do it. This time was different, however. It took only about five minutes of them sitting on silence for him to talk about this particular situation.

It's been eating at him all week. He's supposed to be Johnny's partner. Yet, said man is struggling due to Simon's inability to actually discipline and as soon as he hinted at needing him to step up a bit in that regard— and not unkindly either— he was right back in that small body that used to be his with his father standing over him. Johnny had been the one that was clearly upset and needing support but it ended up with him comforting him instead.

"And why do you think that is?" Dr. Gerber prods. It won't show in the lilt in his voice, but Simon knows he's excited to actually be getting somewhere with his patient.

The blond swallows, "My dad. I didn't necessarily have a good father figure growing up."

He can still hear that laughter echoing against the bathroom stall walls and he clenches a fist, breathing becoming less controlled by the moment. Upon seeing this, his therapist makes a gesture in an attempt to tell him to slow down and breathe.

Simon juts his chin downward before letting out a steady breath. The memories still cling to his eye sockets, just as they always do whenever he allows himself to talk about the horrors or the things his father had put him through. When talking to Leah about it, it had been different. She had needed to hear that. To understand.

Two forms of fear grab onto him: one of the past and one of the future. It's already hard enough to look in the mirror sometimes and see his first tormentor's face reflected back. The same brow bones, the same lips, the same feet, the same height— The same hands. That's what scares him the most. Looking down at the limbs, he can see that those fists within his own marred ones.

He doesn't want that. He doesn't want to be him. Ever.

"I don't want to be my father," Simon swallows, "Not to my kids and they are my kids. Even if I've had them for less than a year, we've all accepted each other as family. But stepping into that disciplinarian role... I'm afraid of the gate that could open. Of who I could be."

The therapist sucks in his lips, looking unapologetically sadly at the wooden floor of his and Johnny's home. He replies with darting eyes around the house, "That's an understandable fear Simon. But I'm going to ask you to take a look around and tell me what you see."

The request stumped him for a second, not totally understanding. It

was their home. Then it hits him.

Home.

Around them toys laid about on the floor along with tiny shoes or socks from Leah's fashion show earlier that day. There's dvds stacked up on the tv stand, a variety of children's movies, the Fox and the Hound being the most worn since it's Alec's favorite. A teething ring rests on the coffee table. Sophie's. In the archway was the drawn on height chart, marking each child's growth spurt.

There's baby snacks in the cupboard of the kitchen, carrots and broccoli for Alec since he doesn't like the texture of other vegetables along with Leah's cotton candy Gogurt in the fridge. The same fridge that has multiple drawings, school report cards, and family pictures hanging on it. Upstairs are their room. In the backyard, their play set.

"Does any of this look like a sign that you are providing them an unhappy homelife? I'd say they're quite spoiled actually" Dr. Gerber chuckles, "Definitely have more stuff than my kids, I'll tell you that."

Simon furrows his eyebrows, not yet facing his full attention back onto the man. Not until he breaks him out of his stupor with a snap. Any other time the action would've been nothing short of rude but by the look in those green eyes, it was obvious that he had something important to say.

The therapist begins, "There is believed to be a thing called the cycle of abuse. It starts with one abusive person tormenting their victim. In this case, the child. You. Now that you're a father yourself, there's two paths that you could've chosen to go down. The first being passing the same abuse that you've faced down onto your children, which it's what you're afraid of. Yeah, sure. Sometimes people stumble into it even with their best attempts not to as they don't know any other way."

Simon's heart was racing in his chest, blood roaring in his ears as he crosses his arms, nails burrowing deeply into the muscles there until there's sure to be some marks. He can feel himself falling deep into a pit. But right as he is about to, the older man continues, "But then there's the second option. Our last session, you had told me about opening up to Leah about some things that you experienced in the past in order to teach her an important life lesson. Can you refresh my memory on what that was?"

Now he's confused. There's no way that Dr. Gerber would've forgotten

what is was that he had said. That was practically impossible considering that he's able to pull something offhandedly mentioned out seemingly out of nowhere, like how he just did. Simon sighs, "I told her about my past with my father because her plank of a headmaster told her a boy was bullying her because he likes her. I didn't want her to think that because we've always taught her the opposite. She deserves to be cherished and appreciated; maybe even spoiled as you said."

Dr. Gerber smiles radiantly, clapping his hands before holding them out openly and wide. "Congratulations, Simon. You already took road number two so you have nothing to worry about."

"I'm not following."

The man's lets out an exhale but his pride doesn't falter as he adjusts his seating position. "You broke the cycle with that alone, kid. That's the second option. Not letting the abuse patterns continue and teaching your children the self worth that you never felt. You have nothing to worry about when it comes to discipline because you are not your father. Not even close. You proved that. Even if you look like him or sound like him or carry his last name, that is not who you are. You are your own man. I have full confidence that you will never lay a hand on your children, Simon. I've met abusers in my time as a therapist and you are not one. Far from it.

"You're connection with abuse begins with victim and ends with a survivor who overcame. Who did better. He can't hurt you anymore. He's gone. I think it's time that you look into the mirror and see yourself rather than him. You deserve a life of peace. You need to let him go," He finishes.

Simon's throat feels like glass. Shattered glass cutting into his esophagus and falling down into his chest cavity, cutting into all of the organs that lay within. It hurts to swallow. His eyes burn.

—

"He can't hurt you anymore."

"You broke the cycle..."

It haunts his mind like a spirit even after the session is long over and he's staring into the bathroom mirror with tear stricken eyes. His nose. His brow bone. His lips. His feet... His hands. Ones that have afflicted damage, sure, but never on the innocent. The same ones that hit the

man who used to hit him, throwing him outside of their house so that his family could finally be free of him.

But Simon hadn't ever been truly free of him. The man was long since dead at this point and he had clung onto his son with claws buried deep into the man's skin, refusing to let go. Until he finally got the courage to say "enough."

In the tub next to him were children's bath toys. Faces faded from long nights of playing with them as giggles and splashing hit against the tile. He closes his eyes, allowing the sweet sound of his children's joy to play over the sickening tempo of his father's maniacal cackle. Eventually, it drowns it out completely.

He is not him. He's fought never to be him. Simon opens his eyes, swallowing thickly. There's a faint knock on the door along with the gentle voice of Johnny saying, "Si?"

"It's unlocked."

There's the sound of the door opening before it shuts so lightly that it almost doesn't make a single sound other than the hatch clicking back into place. Simon turns his way to the tub, lowering to his knees and picking up one of the rubber duckies. He smiles at the pirate eye patch. Then squeezes it and lets the dirty, old bath water to run down his arm.

"Si," Johnny drawls out, "You're not losing it on me right?"

He turns to his boyfriend, who looks slightly alarmed by him playing with the bath toys, and beams at him before lifting the ducky up. He pinches it between his fingers again before starting to laugh to himself about it. The Scot stutters out, "Are- What- Simon?"

He couldn't care right now. A new lightness had overtaken him as a single tear streams down his face, finally falling from his eye. He feels almost hysterical but in this way that's also sort of like floating. Maybe it's peace. That's a rare feeling for him. One he wouldn't recognize. Meanwhile, Soap was definitely feeling the exact opposite of that as he stares at the grown man playing with their children's bath toy in total bewilderment.

He looks up at Johnny, "It's obviously well loved. The face is faded and there's old water in it. It's used quite often. It carries happy memories with it rather than sad ones."

A look of understanding comes onto the brunet's expression as he places a hand on his chest, letting out a huff of relief. He makes his way over, grumbling something underneath his breath that Simon couldn't even begin to understand. Probably along the lines of, "Spooky bastard giving me a fucking heart attack. Thought he went absolutely bonkers on me— fucking numpty." Actually... it was probably exactly that.

"Im guessing you had an insightful therapy session today?" He voice strains as he comes to sit down next to him, "God, I'm getting fucking old."

"You're twenty eight, Johnny. And I guess you could say that," He breathes out. He moves himself so that he's sitting on his butt instead before leaning all of his weight onto Johnny and placing his head on his shoulder. Both men stared at the rubber ducky in his hand.

"They're happy. The kids. They're happy," Simon mutters.

Johnny lets out a airy chuckle at that, "I would think so. For the most part, at least. They have all the toys they could ask for, food, a roof over their heads. They've been through it but we always catch them when they fall."

"We're doing well by them."

"Aye. We are. Even if I lost my temper the other day."

His throat feels thick with emotion as he clenches the toy into his fist now. It squeaks in protest. Simon brings it to his chest, resting it over his heartbeat and chokes out, "I'm nothing like him."

Johnny tenses up at that before wrapping an arm around him and pulling him impossibly closer. It's one of his more vulnerable moments. But he doesn't mind having those with with him. Showing Soap exactly where he's weak doesn't feel like a threat but rather an exercise to strengthen him and make him come out of it better than he was before. Maybe that's all love is in general.

"He may not have loved you, Daddy. But we do. We know you love us too and I'll always remember that."

His memories of his father were nothing like what Leah had described that day. Simon never knew if that man had ever truly loved him, in fact he had thought the that he despised his mere existence. He's sure Tommy had felt the same and that's what had helped pushed him into

his drug addiction to begin with. He knows for a fact that his mother was broken.

But Leah knew. There was not a doubt in her mind that Simon loves her. And not just her but all of them. Alec tries so hard to be like him. Sophie, even if they bicker, will run to him and look for comfort when her teeth hurt rather than running away to cower under her blankets. Johnny looks at him in ways that he's never been looked at before. So much adoration lays there in those blue pools and not even one ounce of fear of what he would do if his mood switches. In fact, if he gets upset, the man will rush over towards him like he had the other day rather than slowly trying to back away.

He is not his dad. Simon is a man that loves his family dearly.

The blond repositions his head, placing a kiss on the underside of Johnny's jaw before confidently stating, "I'm ready to put my foot down. Help you out. I can do it right now."

The Scot bellows a laugh at that, throwing his head back to lean into the tub and he is confident that John Mactavish is an angel sent to him at this point. Once calmed down, the shorter of the two looks at him with a hazy gaze, quite literally looking drunk off of love. He bringing a hand up to cuff his face, running his thumb along the scar cutting across his cheek.

"Well they haven't done anything wrong today," Johnny mumbles, "I'm so proud of you, no leannan."

Then pulls him forwards so their lips meet in the softest kiss that he believes he's ever received in his whole life. It lingers but doesn't change, remaining to be so featherlight that he isn't quite sure of what it means but it makes his heart soar anyways.

The door busts open, practically falling off its hinges. The men jump apart, staring wide eyed at the scene developing in front of them in shock. "Party in the bathroom!" Alec roars, pumping his fist before running full speed at them and crashing directly into one of his fathers.

Simon lets out a pained groan at that and hardly has time to comprehend what had just happened before the boy is climbing on him like a jungle gym. Leah comes running in, hand held in Sophie's as they scurry forwards as quickly as possible since the baby isn't up to her old sisters speed. Once in a safe distance, Leah forces herself into the little spot between them as the other girl lays self across the

both of their legs.

“Steamin’ Jesus!” Johnny exclaims, “What is with all of you today?”

The kids giggle at their parents obvious distress. Even though they had totally broken a sweet moment between him and Johnny, he’s perfectly fine with it. Because all it does is reaffirm that they feel safe with him. That they’re happy.

He’s is not his father.

Chapter End Notes

Next is Leah’s birthday. Then we’re going to skip to New Years.

also I wanted one of them to have a moment where they didn’t have the most perfect parenting moment bc that’s more realistic than constantly being good at it. Especially since overstimulation SUCKS and can cause you to snap for a moment. But i feel like it’s important that if you mess up as a parent, you apologize to your children and recognize what you did wrong. I wanted them to also have the ability to do that.

I feel like it would make sense that Simon would struggle with the idea of discipline so I wanted to include that.

Songs and Love

Chapter Summary

Simon finds something up in the attic. They celebrate Leah's sixth birthday.

Chapter Notes

AAAAAAAAA AFYER A WEEK OF NOT POSTING ITS DONE ITS FINALLY DONE

im so sorry. if you had known the crazy ass week I had. Anyways. Coming down from a horrid cold so I hope that this is satisfactory. I was writing this literally all week and kept falling asleep mid writing bc of said cold. Forgive me? Chapter is very long and fluffy like promised

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"So," Simon mumbles, "Have you thought about What you're going to do yet?" Johnny coughs as dust flies up from the floor after a box had been disturbed, shooing away the particles with his hand.

They were looking through the attic in attempts to find the birthday decorations that Soap's sister had bought for her last year since she refused to use anything but those ones. "Aye. I've come up with nothing," He sighs in response, moving another box in the process.

His boyfriend's voice echos slightly as he moves farther away, "You're in no rush, Johnny. I know you're all about leading a life where you have passion in what you do. It'll come to you."

The younger man huffs at that, shaking his head. Maybe it'll come to him but the main question is when. Simon starts work Tuesday and Sophie official heads into daycare with Alec the day before that since the two men agreed to have one last day together; just the two of them. Lets just say Soap has plenty of ideas on what they could do then. But when it comes to his future, he's lost.

He's too old to chase after his childhood dream of being a goalie, refuses to go back to the military, and doesn't want to work with his dad again. On top of all of this, he has no idea who he is anymore outside of being a boyfriend and father twenty-four seven. The man that he used to be feels so far away now and if he thinks too deeply

about it, he'll just fall into this deep existential crisis while looking for decorations for his daughter's birthday. That situation is less than ideal.

A loud clunk followed by the sound of wrongly moved strings causes him to be ripped from his thoughts as he whips around to see Simon looking down at what his long outstretched limbs had just knocked over; blinking. On the ground lays an old guitar. Its covered in pounds of dust with the rest flowing into the air to join in with the other particles, leaving Soap's eyes to begin to itch.

While staring silently at the instrument, a memory flashes behind his eyelids. A bright, white flash of teeth as blue eyes crinkled in glee with the sounds of string filling the air along. A soft, melodic voice. His sister. It brings a fond smile onto his own face, rather than the any form of pain. Just a bittersweet taste of a memory from so long ago.

He makes his way over to it to kneel down and run his fingers through the fuzz built onto it, revealing the shiny wood underneath. He tries to ignore how his nose is starting to build pressure amongst his sinuses. Johnny looks up at Simon, whispering, "This was Anna's."

Of course it was. It's in her attic. It wouldn't take a genius to figure out who it had belonged to but yet, Simon's eyes soften as he urges on, "Yeah?"

"From when she was a teenager," Johnny informs, "She only played it like twice." The former lieutenant narrows his eyes at it and a slight hum forms in the back of his throat rather than an actual response. He drags a box over before sitting on it and bending at the waist to pick up the object, brushing off the rest of the dust in the process. Johnny sneezes.

The blond mumbles, "Sorry, love." Then, holds it up against the beams of sun coming in through the tiny attic window with furrowed brows as he inspects it. The action in itself confuses Soap. What really does it in though is when he nods to himself and then throws the strap over his shoulder.

Guess they were taking the guitar with them.

By the time they found the decorations, it had been around dinner time. Which, Johnny was currently making since Simon was busy cleaning and tuning the instrument that had been found upstairs (it

was going to be a simple dinner tonight due to this). The man was sat at the dining room table in a leaned back position, fingers strumming along the strings as he turned the keys to adjust the sound. All three of the kids sat by him in some type of way, eyes wide with fascination despite him not even playing yet. Soap assumes that's the end goal, anyways.

Alec sat on a chair besides him. He had pulled it over upon seeing the guitar. Meanwhile, Leah sat on the ground with Sophie in her lap as she whispered words too quiet for anyone but them to hear. The youngest giggles loudly.

Johnny shakes his head at their antics, grabbing some noodles from the pantry as he does so. Just then, the sound of a perfect strum floods his ears and he turns to glance at Simon. The man sits up taller, a smug expression written on his face.

"Daddy!" Leah squeals out, "Play a song!"

Alec excitedly grabs his arm, shaking it wildly. "Yeah! Play a song!" He repeats. Sophie, sensing that they are pestering their father, screams at the top of her lungs and slaps her hands on her legs in protest.

All of this only causes Simon to chuckle to himself. "What song?" He asks.

Alec goes to open his mouth but before he can even get a word out, Leah responds, "You pick!" Instead of throwing some type of fit, the little boy just nods enthusiastically. They all could figure what song he wanted to hear, even if his older sister had jumped in and cut him off before he could even begin to say it. Johnny watches as Simon and Alec make eye contact, the man with a knowing glint in those brown orbs. Moments like this reminds him so much of times with his own father.

Soap thinks that his boyfriend is an amazing dad, despite just a week or two back when he had broken down and informed him that he's scared of becoming Mr. Riley. A true evil. There's no lifetime where such a thing could even begin to be possible; he's even convinced it makes Simon a better parent. Constantly being aware of himself and how he interacts with them. Not many adults have that self awareness and see parenthood only as a form of control while he views it as a way to help their three tiny humans grow.

Soap hates how he came to that conclusion, though.

The blond smirks and plays the first few notes without breaking eye contact. Alec readjusts himself so that he's sitting on on his knees to see better as Simon keeps going, now paying attention to the finger placement on the neck of the guitar instead of the little boy. Johnny glances up once again from where he stood gathering ingredients to cook the meanest Mac n' Cheese the world has ever seen. But then...

"Slow down, you crazy child," Simon sings, "You're so ambitious for a juvenile." The brunet can feel his jaw slack at the sound of his partner's voice, never had heard it until now. Leah turns to him, a huge grin of surprise plastered on her own features before she turns back to her other dad to listen. She enthusiastically shuffles closer.

The sound of his singing is so... Gorgeous. Its the only way that Johnny could even begin to describe it. The family is left completely and totally mesmerized. Some part of him figures that it makes sense that he has such an amazing voice but an even bigger part is way too busy being absolutely shocked that he had managed to keep this from them. Especially from Soap. How has he never heard him sing before?

At some point Alec had clambered onto his leg so that Simon could guide him on how to strum the strings correctly, the big hand over a tiny one controlling it. The image itself caused Soap to practically choke up. The blond hair falls into his boyfriend's face as he tilts his head down to focus on playing, expression peaceful yet concentrated. Alec mimics him, the biggest grin he's ever seen on his face. Soap brings out his phone to take a video.

"You're so ahead of yourself, you forgot what you need. Though you can see when you're wrong, you know you can't always see when you're right," Simon sings, leaning towards Leah and making sure that she makes eye contact with him, *"You got your passion, you got your pride. But don't you know that only fools are satisfied? Dream on, but don't imagine they'll all come true..."*

She giggles at him, holding onto Sophie tighter. He only smiles at her, eyes flickering over to Johnny for a moment as he sits back to continue the song. He gestures to the neck of the guitar and Alec nods, putting his tiny fingers over his father's in an attempt to memorize the way you're supposed to play it. The instrument is so much bigger than the boy so he does struggle but he seems to be having the time of his life either way.

As the song comes to an end, both of the eldest children join Simon, *"And you know that when the truth gets told, that you can get what you*

want or you can just get old. You're gonna kick off before you even get halfway through."

Johnny watches the scene with so much adoration in his heart that it could overflow into his bloodstream and take him out in such a way where he'd be in the afterlife still feeling the effects. All the stresses that they go through. Every moment that's hard. All of it leads up to this exact second in time where they all sit around, the evening light filtering in through the window and creating a halo effect around the two playing the guitar while the girls sit on the ground, beaming up at them. Where Simon looks the most relaxed he's ever seen him with Alec glancing at him every once in a while with this expression of pure admiration.

Riley ran around the backyard, chasing birds and chewing on grass. Not soon after, he ran in through the sliding glass door that they had left cracked open for him and sniffs at the girls' faces before laying down next to them. Sophie reaches out a hand and pets him.

This is all he wants. For the rest of his life. Hell, he had always dreamed of this but never once figured that that he could have it. Why was he so opposed to Simon and him getting married right away anyways?

"When will you realize, Vienna waits for you?"

After the holidays. He's going to propose. Legality be damned.

—

"I feel a little offended," Soap mumbles, halting his hand massaging Simon's bad arm temporarily. The same routine that they do every single night. Watching tv and soothing the injury that has kept the other man out of commission in hopes that they can prevent a really bad flare up, even if they know that it'll hit them either way once he starts working again. Each and every time, the domesticity of it shocks him to his very core.

The other man looks over at him from the tv, face screwed together in confusion at the sudden declaration. The Scot smirks, teasing, "You didn't tell me you had such a nice voice, mo leannan."

Simon scoffs, "That type of stuff doesn't necessary come up in the midst of battle."

"It should've," Johnny responds, pouting, "What if I had died? My last

wish could've been for you to sing me a song." He reaches out, scratching his fingernails along the blond at the nape of his partners neck, appreciating the shiver that it evokes.

Simon leans into the touch, humming, "Wouldn't have done it."

The disappointment he feels is immeasurable. That's unfair. He feels bad for alternative universe Soap somewhere out there, who's dying in Ghost's arms and being refused a song.

"Why not?"

He turns his head, staring at him with so much earnesty that the shorter of the two almost startles from it. Then, Simon presses the side of his face against his arm, placing the gentlest of kisses along the skin there. "I don't think I would've been in my right mind. Your death," He pauses, "It would've probably destroyed me, Johnny. I was already a broken man but losing you? I couldn't even begin to think of how I would've processed it. Don't think I could've. Even before all of this."

That makes Johnny's heart swell. Its understandable, though. The idea of losing Ghost had haunted so many of his dreams when he had been a sergeant. Countless nights he'd wake up, clutching at his chest as the organ within hammered against it so aggressively that he'd be convinced it was trying to break through.

The lieutenant had died in many different ways in his personal hellscape. Sometimes getting shot, others stabbed. Sometimes during the betrayal in Las Almas. But the overall worst were the ones where it was by all technicalities, Johnny's fault. The ones where him coming up short had disastrous consequences.

Ghost would jump in front of him, blocking a bullet from hitting him because he had missed one hostile during a sweep or a grenade bouncing at his feet only for the lieutenant to come out of nowhere to shove him away at the last possible moment. Each time he'd wake up sobbing. He'd curl himself up into a ball, desperate for a comfort from a man that he thought he could never ever receive. Not in a million years. Then next mission, he'd be a little more careful and a little more quiet.

Even back then, Simon was able to read him. He'd bring him out of his dark place with a simple, "You've done great today, Johnny. Thought you were a goner a couple of times with how silent comms were, though."

Maybe that's when Soap should've realized that he had felt the same. Ghost never reached out to the other 141 members like that. Not once. That's what that was. It was his way of making sure his sergeant was okay and telling him that he enjoyed their banter, even if he didn't outwardly say these things.

"Johnny," Simon whispers so low that he wasn't sure if it had actually occurred. But he was one hundred percent sure of the next set of words falling onto his ears, "I've never loved anyone like I love you. You're everything to me. Have been ever since we met. Promise me that once the kids are raised and we've grown grey in this big old house that you'll let me go first."

Let him go first? He doesn't want that.

The desperation on Simon's face, however, stops his train of thought right in its tracks. He looks at his boyfriend with so much sympathy before shifting forwards to give him a featherlight kiss. Johnny cradles his face afterwards, running his thumbs along the scars that lay across the skin there. "You know I can't promise that. We don't know what life has in store for us, Simon."

"Try."

His usual deep gruff sounds so higher pitched and broken. Johnny isn't entirely sure of what was going on in Simon's mind right now though he was sure that it wasn't good.

He sighs, "Alright. Even though I don't ever want to know a world without you again, I'll try, Simon. I promise that I'll at least try."

The sound of wood thumping against a boot causes Soap to stick out his head from the kitchen, lips pressed together in slight annoyance at the offender. The autumn air blows around the curtain in swirls, leaving it to hit the Scot in the face as he glared down their longtime father figure. Price stops stomping, blinking at Johnny incredulously before tilting his beer into the air and saying, "Looks good, son! Sturdy too. Wanna do mine?"

The youngest of the three men snort, "Get the fuck, captain."

"Oi!" Price scolds, "You're not allowed to say that word. Simon says

so!"

Butterflies flutter in Simon's chest cavity at the way the man he loves just rolls his eyes with a playful huff of breath falling past his mouth. He's gone as quick as he came. "Don't get on his nerves too much, Price. I'll never hear the end of it later," He jokes to the captain, stepping back to look at the banner over the sliding glass door that they had been outside to hang up. The older man shoos away the thought.

"I don't have to worry about that, you do that enough for the both of us." If that's not the truth. He adores it too. Wouldn't change it for the world, if ever given the opportunity to do so.

A voice yells from inside, "I can hear you!"

Both can't help but laugh at the slight annoyed tone. While Price continues to inspect the deck that Soap had built, Simon maneuvers his vision inside to where the birthday girl sat with her friends that had come early, showing off her collection of dolls. A chill wisps across his exposed skin from the November air. It finds its way into his bones, leaving him to shiver in a way that's less than pleasing, much unlike the ones he experiences nowadays from the touch of a very specific someone. The someone he should actually be helping. "Don't stay out here too long, old man. You'll get yourself sick."

The only response that he gets back is a sound of discontent, resulting in the other to chuckle as he slid himself back inside into the warm air while closing the door behind him. Immediately a limb slings around his waist and he's turning to find his gorgeous boyfriend greeting him. The heat coming from the man is comforting, soothing the chill from being outside with Price for a tad too long. Soap was always a furnace. It comes in handy.

Simon smiles underneath the surgical mask that he was wearing, mumbling, "Warming me up?"

"Aye. Know how cold you get," Johnny follows along, "It's purely tactical, Lt."

He lets out a little huff of laughter at that, allowing himself to press in closer to the touch that was given to him while looking over at their daughter. Riley now sat under the table, begging as if the girls had any food on them. "Damn dog," He mutters.

"Let em' be. He's got some wits to him. He won't eat a toy," Soap turns

so that they're hugging before adding into his chest, "... Hopefully."

The taller man lets out a sigh of content, reciprocating the embrace and burying his nose into his partners hair. Smells of his shampoo floods all of his sense, easing his sharp edges as Simon allows himself to disappear into something thats just so purely Johnny. Once again, the way that the other man seems to ground him just by existing leaves him reeling and unable to figure out why he denied himself of this for as long as he had.

The sound of giggles bursts their little bubble. Both turn their attention to the source of the sound, seeing the three girls all peeking over at them from where they sat. To Simon's dismay, Johnny pulls away and growls out lightheartedly, "Nosey bairns! I'll gie ye a skelpit lug!" All of them squeal out a mixture of laughs and screams, fleeing the scene by running up the stairs the second he takes a step forwards.

Meanwhile the other is taking a moment to translate it in his head. Nosey children. He has that one pretty much down... I'll gie ye a skelpit lug... Maybe thats the slap on the ear one? That sounds a bit right. He's heard Johnny's mom tell him that one quite often whenever they're over there visiting and he sticks his finger in whatever the older woman had been cooking to taste test it. It did in fact follow with a light thwap of the spatula on his arm, not enough to hurt him just more of a tap. It didn't even make a sound.

Of course, Soap being the menace he was would just laugh and hug his mother. He'd kiss up to her after that. She fell for it every time with a ghost of a laugh in her pulled up lips and it made Simon wonder if he does the same. He quickly comes to the conclusion that he doesn't want to know the answer.

"You tryin to figure out what I said?" Johnny asks, teasingly. Simon glares at him. Oh yeah, that man is a menace. For sure.

The brunet grabs his chin, poking fun at the sour expression by pouting dramatically. He doesn't even have time to snap some sort of banter at his boyfriend before the most radiant smile causes his brain to short circuit. All teeth, crinkled crows feet. Beautiful. The surgical mask is pulled down, replaced by the pair of lips that he's so familiar with at this point. Despite this, it always sends a surge of electricity down his spine.

Simon reciprocates enthusiastically. They find themselves wrapped up in each other. A repeat of just moments before. They don't even notice

the sound of the back door sliding open followed by Riley barreling past them until Price yells out, "Get a bloody room, you two! We get it! You're in love. Quit faffin' about and help an old man out. Can't do all the work myself."

They pull away from each other and Simon hooks a finger on the mask to place it back into position. Soap gets a devious expression on his features as he makes his way over to the former captain. "I'm confused. Do you want us to help or to get a room? Your orders were unclear, sir," He pesters.

"You're so lucky you're not under my command anymore, boy," Price snorts, "I'd have you running until your legs gave out for that one." He opens the oven to look at the cake inside as Johnny leans up against the counter, tapping his fingers along it with a pleased smirk on his face.

"Aye, sir. Can't boss me around anymore."

"Keep it in that thick, Scottish noggin' of yours that your children do call me Grandpa. So that counts for something, I'm sure."

Simon can't help but feel warmth watching the two argue back and forth with each other, just like old times. Having Price around is always so nice. The kids adore him and if he's honest with himself, he misses the old bastard as well (see old— nearing his forties now).

Johnny cackles at that, "Scottish noggin! Those same kids are also Scottish! Or did you forget that in your elderly age, sir?"

"Oi! I'm thirty nine!"

Just then, the front door opens. Simon comes around the archway to see- balloons? Rather than a person standing there, it was a layer of pink and white balloons causing the man to furrow his eyebrows in confusion. Clarity is given, however, when Gaz sticks his head through them and calls out, "Where's the birthday girl?"

Theres the sound of feet barreling down the stairs clumsily and faintly Johnny scolds, "Careful!" A little body pushes past Simon before a look of apology from Leah is thrown his way as the former sergeant lets the balloons go into the house. He decides to let that go since it is her birthday and she hasn't seen the man she considers her uncle in a bit.

"Uncle Gaz!" She exclaims, jumping into his outstretched arms. He hoists her up off her feet, squeezing her dramatically with a sound and

swiveling back and forth so that her feet swing. Leah lets out little giggles.

Gaz tells her, "Happy birthday, love."

Callie comes up behind the two, tapping Gaz on the shoulder. In result he looks back at her, makes a noise of realization and sets the child down before making his way in the door to allow her to come in.

Simon pushes off the wall then, clapping his former subordinate on the shoulder with a greeting of, "Good to see you, Gaz."

"You too, Simon," He replies, smirking, "Getting a little friendly as you get up there in age, huh? Never told me that before."

"Watch it, Sergeant. Could still pummel you into the dirt if I so chose to."

Gaz bellows out a laugh then, shaking his head and mimicking the position. Way back when, Ghost would've stepped away from the touch on his own shoulder with a tight squeeze to his friends wrist and a warning glare that would scare off any sane man. (Johnny is not a sane man, as covered). But now, as time goes on and he allows himself time to appreciate others around him, he revels in the familiarity.

The sign of friendship and camaraderie is more of a comfort that he no longer detests. So perhaps Gaz is right. He is getting a bit friendlier. Kind of like an old cat, too tired to even be as fiery as he once had been and instead searching out a place to lay where the warmth hits him just right. He thinks his makeshift family in fact that warmth.

His eyes fall onto Adeline, on Callie's hip, who starts flailing her arms about in glee upon seeing that his attention was finally on her. "Oh, look at you, monster!" He coos, inching towards her and taking her from her mother, "You've gotten so big!"

She claps her hands on either side of his face and a wistful feeling washes over him, remembering when Sophie used to be this small. Sure, Addy had gotten bigger but still nothing compared to how much his own daughter has grown. The little thing runs around the house like mad now, snatching things off the table in the process with loud chortling as the two men raising her chase her.

"I know," Callie breathes out, a frown on her face, "Its like you blink

and suddenly she's grown two more centimeters and hit five more important milestones." She reaches out, adjusting her daughter's shirt with a sad look in her eyes. He recognizes it. The same one that he's seen on Johnny's face multiple times. It's the expression of a bittersweet feeling of time taking what you hold most precious to you and aging it. The clock never stops ticking. They never stop growing.

It's something that messed with his partner quiet often. Sometimes he'll find him looking at old pictures and saying, "They're getting too big." He throws Simon into the same spiral with that sentence alone and he's not sure how it's possible to have a one-sided beef with time. But they do.

"That's what it's like," He informs her.

Gaz cuts in then, questioning, "Does it get any easier?"

Simon can't help the tenseness of his shoulders at that before a shaky exhale leaves him. He shakes his head, supplying a heavy but quick, "No." He brings his eyes back to Adeline. She had now managed to pull his dog tags out of his shirt and was playing with the two thin metallic bars at the end of the chain. That reminds him. Before Price leaves, he should ask for an extra pair of his and Johnny's tags so that when they pass, each kid gets their own since each only comes with two identifiers.

That thought, however, is too sad right now to even begin think about on Leah's birthday so he opts instead to really observe how much Adeline looks like her father. Same skin, same kind brown eyes, same smile. A Gaz lookalike, if he's honest. "Callie, she got absolutely none of you," He jokes, looking over at the mother.

She throws her hands up in the air. "I know! How unfair is that?" She cries out in response, eyes bulging, "I carried her for nine months and she came out looking exactly like him! My genes stood no chance, Si, I'm telling you."

"Didn't we make a comment when she was born that she looked like him? Can't understand why we're even surprised."

"We did. But I still have a right to be upset about it," She huffs. Leah gets on her tippy toes to stare at Adeline before turning to the woman, innocence shining in her eyes.

She declares loudly, bouncing on her feet, "I think she looks like you, Aunt Callie!"

"Thank you, Leah. Why don't you go play? I know you're only still here to try to peek into the present. That's why you're still on your tippy toes." Callie makes a show of clutching the birthday bag in her hand up higher, making sure she couldn't look into it. Simon blinks. He hadn't even realized that's what she was doing.

Callie's good.

The little girl groans dramatically, falling flat on her feet before throwing her head back and shuffling away. Once far enough, she bounds haphazardly back up the stairs with Johnny once again scolding from in the kitchen, "Leah Jean! Be careful!"

"Sorry!"

Gaz finally shuts the door, a sound of amusement coming from him. "Soap is such a dad now, holy shit. Speaking of which, where's the rest of the MacTavish clan? So far I've accounted for Simon, Leah, and John— Where's the other two?"

Something about that wording causes the former lieutenant to want to throw up in a positive way. That's the only way to describe it. The idea of him being bunched in as a member of the family is something that's not new but still manages to make him feel euphoric every single damn time. A place of belonging.

It takes him a second to give an answer. He shakes his head, clearing his throat, "Johnny's parents are getting Sophie and Alec ready upstairs. He's had about seven meltdowns today about what to wear because his favorite shirt is dirty. Which, I wish we had known prior to today."

As if on cue, Alec comes down the stairs while almost tripping and Simon is totally convinced these children are going to send his boyfriend into complete cardiac arrest at this point. He hands Adeline back over to her parents so that he can take care of this issue with his own children. He makes a hand gesture for his son to stay right where he is before standing at the bottom of the staircase and sternly hollering, "Oi! The next time your father has to tell the lot of you to be careful on these steps, someone's going to be in trouble!"

"Sorry dad!" The muffled voice of Leah comes from her room. He glances down at Alec who apologetically grins up at him, receiving a slow blink from his father along with a ruffle of his hair before lightly guiding him back towards Gaz and Callie by his head in a playful manner. The boy laughs. Then, runs off.

Simon makes his way over to Soap, who was now stocking the fridge full of sodas and juice boxes, and hugs him from behind. The shorter straightens up to place one hand on his cheek while using the other to rub his arm and for once, his hands feel freezing cold. He doesn't mind, though.

"Thank you, love," Johnny purrs.

The blond makes a noncommittal noise back. He's faintly aware of Price staring at them with this smug look on his face but he chooses to ignore it. Instead, muttering to his partner, "Where do you want me?"

Soap brings one of limbs around his middle up to his mouth, peppering Simon's hands with multiple kisses.

"Can you help Price with dinner?"

"Of course."

"Thank you, Si."

—

They were opening presents when Johnny's fate had been sealed without anyone knowing. Leah had gotten two switches. Two Animal Crossing: New Horizon's.

Simon at the time, hadn't really thought too much of it other than feeling bad for Gaz and Callie after they winced at the present from Soap's parents being opened. Sometimes this happens with kids. Its just a shame that they had bought something so expensive. At least one of them had been one that they could hook up to the tv and the other a simple blue handheld one that they could perhaps give to Alec once he's a bit older.

He didn't even register that Johnny had stared at the blue electronic for a tad too long, even keeping his gaze locked on it from where it sat across from him. Simon was too busy reading cards for Leah and handing her the next presents.

To say the kid got spoiled is an understatement. Shes had a tough year, which everyone attending the party had known considering that she was the oldest of the three children. So, he guesses that a part of them knew that the accident had a heavy cloud over her head that had followed her around these past few month. But slowly, shes healing.

Her smile is a bit brighter, there aren't anymore bags under her eyes, more often then not shes able to sleep through the night— And Simon couldn't be more proud of her.

When Sophie tries to take her present, she doesn't shove her. All she does is gently remove her hand with a quiet, "I'll share with you. I promise. That's what older sisters do." And it fills him up to the brim with pride at how well she has been doing lately.

By the time they're done presents, a majority of the family has left and now Simon is standing outside with Price and Soap's father after they were all ushered out of the kitchen since they made dinner. Well, Clyde didn't but he said he needed a cigarette. Simon had tried to argue with Johnny that he had also helped prep for the party but his mother had already been on it. She told him to go sit down and let her and his sister put everything away. So thats exactly what the Scot was currently doing.

The other man had come outside in an attempt to ask their former captain for the extra tags but that conversation has long since ended with a promise of getting them by New Year. Mr. MacTavish had enjoyed hearing that Simon was thinking that far into the future with "his boy," as he called him. If only he had any idea.

Price blew out smoke from the cigar while discussing some form of dad topic with Clyde, probably football, while the youngest of them sits on the swing. He fiddled with the box in his pocket. Unsure.

He pulls the box out before he could think better of it, causing both men to quiet down at the sound of it being popped open. Price stares, wide eyed. No one speaks. No one moves. Clyde's cigarette burns away without being ashed. The whole time the ring glistens in the moonlight in a taunting manner as Simon's brown eyes flicker between the two that the future owner of it sees as father figures. One of them being his too. The other, hopefully his father-in-law soon.

"Well, son," Price starts, "I hope thats not for me because I'm going to have to decline."

The joke eases some of the intensity of the moment away as Clyde belly laughs at it, punching the deliverer in the shoulder. Simon takes a shaky breath. It doesn't really compute fully as a jest in his brain, considering he could feel the sweat building on his hairline in spite of the cold, night air. Why was he so nervous? He stands, correcting, "Its

for Johnny..."

There's a soft expression on Price's face now as he nods, fully understanding the extent of how much this is effecting him and not wanting to make him more anxious. The older men step closer, leaning over to mull over the ring to the best of their ability in the minimal light coming from the porch fixtures. It's a serene moment for Simon. It's precious and he's wordlessly asking for their permission to go through with this, which he's not quite sure if they've figured that out yet. Simon Riley may not be a lot of things but he wasn't raised as anything other than a proper gentleman by his mother.

Of course he was going to at least ask for Soap's father's blessing. It just so happens that the opportunity presented itself to ask for both when Clyde had mentioned being glad about future planning. It had been there for the taking. So, Simon took it.

A heavy paw falls onto his shoulder, almost as strong as his. He looks over at the person it belonged to, seeing nothing but seriousness in Clyde's eyes for the first time since he's met the boisterous man. "You serious? You're not pulling our legs right now?"

Simon holds the box stupidly, opening and closing his mouth for a moment. There's no real reason for this to be as nerve wracking as it is. Hell, Clyde and him know each other quite well at this point since they'll be working together soon and he's dating his son. Not to mention, raising his grandchildren. But yet, his hands feel the urge to shake.

"As a heart attack, sir," He answers evenly, "I want to marry your son."

Tears well up in Clyde's blue eyes. It's an even more rare sight than the previous one and Simon would be lying if he didn't say it threw him for a loop. Johnny's father swallows, "Then you will."

As if Price knew what was coming next, he plucks the box from his former lieutenant's grip under the guise of inspecting the spiral in better lighting. He doesn't have a moment to comprehend that action. Suddenly, Simon's wrapped up in a tight hug without warning, momentarily turning into a plank with his back completely straightened and tight. Clyde pulls away.

"Sorry!" He apologized, "Forgot about the whole touch thing you have. Forgive me."

The obvious sincerity on his face touches Simon. Sure, Johnny's father

is one talkative man that struggles with things like boundaries- much like his son- but he does genuinely mean well and can tell when he crossed a line- again, much like his son. "Its alright," Simon comforts.

"So, Lieutenant Simon 'Ghost' Riley is getting married?" Price interrupts, "Never thought I'd see the day..."

He makes a show of snatching the box out of the captain's grip and placing it safely in his pocket once again, no real heat behind the action. But he's sure that he knows that by now.

They have a silent stare down afterwards, neither faltering or looking away. A challenge thats not really a challenge. Back when Simon had worked under him, this occurred whenever Price had said something that he hadn't agreed with— Most of the time it being something to do with sending Soap on a solo mission or somewhere without Ghost to look after him.

Then, he cracks a grin, "You got a problem with that, old man?"

Price mirrors it, "Not at all."

Back inside, Clyde pulls both his wife and daughter to the side. Soap's mother covers her mouth as a gasp escapes and looks over at Simon from where she stood, barely contained excitement leaking off of her. Clara leans in close to her mother, whispering something into her ear that immediately causes her to put on her best poker face. If he's any good at reading lips, he'd guess it was, "Ma' keep yer heid."

Simon always appreciates Clara's efforts.

Leah glances over from where she was sitting on the couch, chin on Johnny's shoulder as she was just watching him play on the blue switch from earlier. Alec was passed out on the other side and Sophie was in the same boat except curled into his lap. Price wordlessly takes out his phone, snapping a picture of the moment and mumbling, "I'll send that to you later."

He doesn't get a chance to say a form thank you before Leah is whisper yelling, "Grandpa Price! Come look at Dad's island."

A bunch of alerts go up in Simon's brain but he ignores them as places a finger to his lip towards the MacTavishes in the dining room. They nod. He can only pray to a God that he doesn't believe in that Johnny

won't hear about him proposing before he gets to actually do it. He makes his way over to his family. Price is now sat next to Leah, eyes glued on the tiny screen.

What game was this again? Animal Crossing? He's starting to want to know exactly what it is and how it had pulled five of the people that he loves the most into some hypnotic state in the span of thirty minutes. "Johnny, love, the kids are asleep on you."

His boyfriend grunts in response. Simon only snorts at that before bending down and scooping Alec up with a groan of, "Come on, sunshine. Lets get you off to bed." He basically ragdolls until he rests his head on his father's shoulder, completely knocked out from the day. Johnny opens his arms, allowing access to Sophie as well. The blond sighs, "Guess that means you too, princess."

He uses his free arm to grab the youngest of the three and place her in a similar position. It gets Soap to look away from the screen for a second, whistling, "Impressive."

"Johnny," Simon warns, jutting his chin towards Leah who was sluggishly trying to keep her eyes open, "You get her up to bed."

Now, he knew it wasn't likely going to happen. He knows his partner fairly well at this point. When the Scot finds something to mentally cling onto, he *clings*. That doesn't mean that he won't be somewhat exasperated when he comes back down to find the two in the exact spot he left them in. Price has enough awareness of this dilemma to give him a look of sympathy. Sometimes Simon wishes troublemaker didn't seem to run deep in the MacTavish family line bloodstream.

He shakes his head, making his way past the other half of the family. He nods politely. "Do you need any help?" Johnny's mother coos.

"Nah, I got them. Really," He spares a moment to grin politely at her since the mask was long gone, "Thank you, Isla. You're always such a huge help. I don't know what we'd do without you."

The woman places a hand over her heart, shooting him a meaningful look with a pout. So thats where Soap got that pout from. Good to know. Before he leaves, Clara whistles in an exact echo of her older brother, "Impressive." He lets out a huff of amusement, going up the stairs and putting each child to bed. While upstairs, he makes a point to place the ring box back into its hiding spot far underneath the bed where Johnny couldn't even being to reach if he tried. How does he know this?

Because he knows his boyfriend.

So no, it was not surprise that when he returned, he had found Soap and Leah still fully into the video game. What was completely shocking to him was Price being passed out next to his daughter, head tilted back and loud snoring coming from his mouth.

Grandpa, indeed.

“Johnny,” He chides. His boyfriend blinks harshly, coming back to his senses of the world around him. Who would’ve thought that this man was once a well respected soldier that was taught to be aware of his surroundings at all times.

Upon noticing the disappearance of the other two children from Simon’s arms, he places the handheld Switch down in shame while smoothing over the back of it with his hands like it was an article of clothing. “Oops,” He says, looking off to the side. This results in the taller to grab the device from his lap and cross his arms against his chest.

“Alright,” Johnny sighs, “We’re goin’, we’re goin’! Come on birthday girl, off to bed.”

“I get to stay up later now because I’m six,” She yawns, being jostled by him now standing from the spot on the couch. Both of her fathers let out quiet laughs at that, careful not to disturb the sleeping figure next to her.

The brunet leans down to her height, asking, “And who made that rule up?”

“Me.” She rubs a closed fist at her eyes. Even though it seems like she wanted to stay up, she lets herself be picked up from her spot nonetheless as she wraps her arms and legs around Soap like a baby koala. The sight itself is endearing.

Simon places a free hand on Johnny’s back, leaning to place a kiss on the top of her head. “Happy birthday, monster. Goodnight,” He whispers to her, smoothing back the brown hair from her face as she tiredly blinks at him.

“Goodnight, Daddy,” She hums back. A little puddle of drool forms on the man holding her’s shoulder as she slowly starts to drift off into sleep, probably jumpstarted by the comfort of being held by a parent. Leah always tends to fall asleep easy in their arms, usually regardless

of how awake she had been prior to that. Simon makes eye contact with his partner, smiling softly at the exhausted bags under his blues as well.

This party had run a little later than usual. They were all too busy enjoying their time together to even notice what time it was. He can't say that anyone really has a solid idea of the exact numbers now, either.

Simon instructs, "You head to bed, love. I'll take care of seeing the stragglers out and making sure Price is comfortable."

"No," Johnny borderline whines, "I didn't help with the kid—"

"You are dead on your feet. It's okay. Go on up, I'll be there in a sec."

His boyfriend pouts at him, weakly nodding while seemingly trying to keep his eyes forced open with a small, "okay." Their lips meet in a quick peck. After he's shuffled away, Simon places the switch onto the table and turns to the snoring man. He removes the hat, setting it down next to the switch followed by him pulling Price by the ankles into a more comfortable position.

In the process of doing this, he had managed to whisper a quick goodbye to Johnny's (???) his (??) other side of the family as they slipped out the door. Once the captain is in a pretty okay spot, he places the throw pillow underneath his head along with a blanket to go over him. He's just grateful that Price had taken his shoes off after coming inside.

Simon steps back, placing two hands on his waist only to hiss at the sudden pain shooting up his arm. Damn nerve damage acting up. He grunts out in frustration, flicking the limb and therefore making it worse like the idiot he is. It occurs to him that Johnny hadn't done the usual routine due to the birthday party running so late but he can't bring himself to regret it. Leah seemed more than thrilled. It was worth it.

Still, he finds himself primarily using his left hand to lock the doors and turn off the lights while Riley follows him around, sniffing the old injury as he clutches onto it between tasks. "I'm alright. Don't you worry your little head, Ri. I'm not bloody dying or anything," He soothes.

Riley whimpers in response, licking the air in attempts to do so to the pain but missing because of him moving on. The sound of paws

trotting behind him follows him all the way to his and Johnny's shared room. "Riley's wit ye?" The Scot mumbles, accent heavy from him obviously trying to fight off sleep. The only way to tell it was even a question was the almost drunken influx of his voice.

"Yeah, my damn arms acting up," Simon grumbles in response, shutting the door as Riley jumps up onto the bed. He feels incredibly... Almost senior in this moment and he distantly ponders if this will be how their lives will be some day in the far future. Realistically speaking, he's not that old. He's turning thirty two in January. Still, its sort of daunting.

As Simon goes to peel off his shirt, another hot flash of pain vibrates up his arm and he flinches away from the activity. Soap is out of bed immediately, thumping over clumsily and placing two hands on his face. "You're going to aggravate it, my love," He coos, petting his cheeks in such a loving way that Simon can help but melt from it.

"Arms up, darling." He listens to Johnny, holding his arms up in the air and allowing his lover to remove the shirt off of him. This is the first time that they've ever done this. There's never been time in their relationship when he had his clothes removed off of him without the intent of sex behind it. It's a whole other form of intimacy that has him staring at his boyfriend in a state of complete and total awe.

"So good, Simon," Johnny praises quietly, "You're doing so good, love."

"A lot of—" He winces as his arm screams in protest at him putting it back down. Within seconds, there's fingers massaging over the old scar that chase the heat away, leaving behind a steady buzz instead. Not completely gone but temporarily relieved. It gives Simon a second to continue his sentence, "A lot of pet names tonight."

Johnny dumbly slurs, "M'Tired."

Its then that his own exhaustion hits him. His eyes feel heavy and his mouth feels as if his tongue had turned into a cotton ball. Being able to sense this, whether it be from his posture or the look in his eyes, Soap nods. "Alright, lets get these jeans off you, yeah?"

"At least take me to dinner first, Johnny."

"Simon, we've literally discussed marriage and have had sex countless times. Did you hit your head?" He slaps his good hand over his face, rubbing up and down as the sound of a zipper fills the room. Usually

this would be enough to get him going but his bloody arm hurts like hell and he's so old and so tired that he sure as hell doesn't have it in him. The thought is unbelievably frustrating.

Yes, hes starting to get grumpy. Sue him.

Its still nice sharing this moment with Johnny, though. No ones ever taken care of him like this. Maybe its the universe paying him forwards for taking care of Price just less than fifteen minutes ago or maybe he just has incredibly good taste when it comes to men and picking a life partner. The latter seems more convincing. He helps said life partner by stepping out of his pant legs.

Before he even knows it, they're in bed with Johnny's chest is to his back and practiced hands massaging over his bad limb resting on Simon's chest. They were laying with the taller man sprawled on top of the younger one, legs tangled together under the blankets. At some point, a silly deliriousness had settled deep within him and no matter how hard he had tried, he couldn't resist it. "What did the zero say to the eight?" He sets up.

The forming smile moves against the back of the blond's neck as Johnny tries to hide his face, most likely to avoid him seeing how much he actually enjoys these jokes. A puff of air from his nose sends a shiver down Simon's spine.

He asks, "What?"

"Nice belt."

A loud groan comes from behind him as he lets out hushed laughter, afraid of piercing into the soft intimacy surrounding them at this moment. "That was your worst one yet." Still, the sound of Johnny's amusement floods into Simon's ears and its just as beautiful as always. They stay like this for a while, fingers working into damaged nerves, bad jokes coming from a former superior officer turned boyfriend and hopefully soon husband.

Eventually, they fall asleep, Simon curled up in the arms of Johnny as the pain seeps away into a dull ache. He's one hundred percent sure that he had picked the perfect life partner, even if a menace to society sometimes.

Chapter End Notes

I lied last chapter. WE HAVE TO GET THROUGH CHRISTMAS BC

I FORGOT SIMONS TRAUMA REGARDING THAT DAMNED HOLIDAY FOR A SEC. So yes. We will be covering that NEXT chapter. I will respond to all the comments I missed tomorrow <3 much love to you darlings. I always appreciate you, just havent been on ao3 much this past week.

I also made a twt. @GHOSTSGAZ come hangout if you want!

I also tried not to pass out while writing the end of this chapter bc I am

Still in fsct sick!!! Hope it doesn't show too muvh

Christmas

Chapter Summary

This chapter is very angst filled but there is some comfort sprinkled throughout. Please be cautious while reading as death, blood, and flashbacks are mentioned quite often

Chapter Notes

Christmas special in march HELLOO

slaps this baby is a whooping 15,000 words. Take as much time as need be to read this one.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"Steamin' fuckin God damn Jesus," Johnny sobs into the toilet bowl, a gentle hand running up and down his back along with the sound of quiet shushes in his ear. He clutches onto the water bottle tighter. It crackles in his grip, causing his brain to protest at the sudden noise. Sweat drips off of his unnaturally pale skin as he rests his head on the seat, shakes consuming his entire body while he fights down the bile that threatens to come up his throat.

Outside, the morning sun is just starting to come in to the large bathroom. He could smell the sent of gasoline from the man providing him comfort as his work clothes reeked of it. It makes everything better and worse all at same time.

Theres the sound of shoes slapping against tile followed by the thump of someone sitting somewhere behind him. It echoes against the walls. A tiny voice exclaims, "Uh oh. Uh oh. Da!"

A pair of wide and curious blue eyes come into his vision, little fingers pushing back the strands of his hair stuck to his forehead by sweat. Theres another plop sound. His eyes fall onto the little girl who sat cross legged next to him now. He tries to give her his best smile but it definitely come off as weak. She returns a gummy grin. "Hey wee bairn," Soap coughs.

She waves back, "Da."

Soap lulls his head back towards the bowl again as another gag rolls up his throat. He feels Simon reach out to her, sliding her away from

the threat of her father blowing chunks in her vision. "Sophie," The blond cuts in, "Dad's alright. Why don't you go back out into the living room and watch some tv? I don't want you getting sick right before Christmas."

"Bleh! Yucky!"

"Yes. Yucky is right. Off you go now."

Soap heaves into the toilet bowl, tears sliding down his cheeks from the effort. His stomach twisted and churned. Sophie leaves the bathroom and a gentle kiss is placed on his damp curls before a hand follows, smoothing it back. This was totally not in the plans for today. Not at all. It was two weeks before Christmas so he was supposed to finish the shopping that he had only gotten partially done and he wasn't about to ask Simon to do it for him.

One, because he has work today and Soap's father is already on the way to pick him up. Two, he knows that Christmas isn't necessarily the best time for his boyfriend and he'd never ask him to go to some crowded mall with tons of decorations. Sure, Simon might have a new family but that will never replace the one that he had lost so long ago now. The last thing that he needs is a reminder of that by shopping for kids toys that he could've been buying for Joseph at one point.

"Simon," He breathes, trying to pull away. Johnny can do this. He used to be a soldier in the SAS. A little stomach bug is nothing compared to what he had used to work through. This is doable.

"Johnny, what are you doing?"

His stomach whirls as he tries to stand. "I need to- Theres things that I-," Johnny's stuttering is cut off as he suddenly empties his stomach contents once again. In between bouts of sickness he lets out whimpers. Totally useless.

Once finished, he helplessly whines out, "Christmas."

The man behind him tenses up at that. However, right as it seems like he had mustered up the courage to ask about what Soap could've meant, theres a knock on the front door. "Drink your water, love. I'll be right back."

The comfort that Johnny had been relying so deeply on is suddenly gone and he can't help the sob that emerges from him at that, emotions bubbling along with his stomach acid. Of course this would

happen. Why wouldn't it?

Just last week Leah had come home with the worst bug and Johnny had decided to make it his personal mission to be her nurse. Now, he gets it. Maybe this is the universe's revenge for all of the times that he had brought home some sort of sickness right before the holidays and caused his poor parents to catch it. Or perhaps it's a common occurrence since everyone and their fuckin' mother is out and about around Christmastime. Either way, he wants to curse whichever child gave his daughter this with nothing but coal this year.

Gaz is going to have to do it for him. That's the only way this will work. He'll have Simon drop off the list on the way to work today and maybe someone can get the kids to school for him? Gaz perhaps. He won't make his dad and boyfriend do it. They have to update the shop.

Johnny shakily opens up his water bottle and places it to his lips. The cool liquid soothes the burn in his throat that he hadn't recognized until now. He quickly downs it as if he had just trudged through the desert without any water for days before letting out a guttural sound and throwing it off to the side.

"Oh," A deep, familiar accented voice says with nothing but sympathy, "Mo laochain."

He outwardly groans, allowing his body to fully slump against the toilet as his bones feel like jelly at this point. Inwardly, however, that tone and the sound soothes his inner child in ways that make him feel safe as a droplet drips into the toilet. He's not sure at this point if it's sweat, slopper, or tears. "I'm nae little anymore, Da'," He spits into the bowl.

Despite this slight attitude that he tends to get while feeling like absolute crap, he reaches towards the sound of the older man's direction. When it clasps in his own, he lets out a slight sigh.

Look, sometimes you just need the comfort from a parent. It's what Leah needed the other day. If he's puking his guts out every five seconds, it would be nice to be held by one of the two that's been there his whole life as he does so. "You'll always be nothing but a wee laddie to me, boy," His father chuckles, "Especially in yer weakest moments... Like noo, hm?"

There's a faint sound of the sink running before the grasp on Soap's hand is let go. He whimpers at the loss of contact.

"Simon, when he's sick he becomes extremely clingy. Remember that."

That's right, he's sick. It's right before Christmas. No one should be near him. Then they'll get sick and he'll feel extremely bad about it. Especially his dad. Shit, he's back to bringing home sicknesses to his poor father right before an important holiday hits; this is the universe mocking him at this point,

His boyfriend laughs, "I know. Not the first time I've seen him like this. Usually it's after a night of drinking with Alejandro, though."

A soft touch is placed onto his chin, tilting his head away from the toilet as the handle is pulled to flush away his mess. Afterwards, a cold fabric is placed on his flushed skin as it softly dabs away at some of the discomfort that he felt.

There's nothing more that Johnny wants to do but melt into it but he can't allow it. He won't be the reason that people miss Christmas and he needs to get his act together anyways. There is no getting Gaz to do it. He has his own family to worry about. It wouldn't be fair to put the added stress three other children on him last minute.

"Da', stop. I don't want ye getting sick because o' me," He grumbles, trying to detach himself.

"Hush up. You're mah child. Ah would get sick for ye any day. Ye should ken that by noo, considering yer raisin' yer own. Guessing that's how ye ended up 'ere in the first place, aye?"

All he can muster up is a weak, "Aye."

"We're aff tae git ye a' set up and then I'm going to take the weans to school, a'richt? Don't ye worry about anythin'. Yer good ole' man has it a' covered. Simon, run the bath. Not hot. We want to get his temperature down."

Soap can't help but laugh at that, "Yer goin' tae gimme a bath? It really is like I'm a child again." He's hauled off his feet with a grunt of effort and an "up you go, lad." His vision tilts and whirls just like his stomach had been doing earlier, causing the arm around him to grip him a bit tighter as he leans.

—

Simon had been the one to give him a bath. Now he lays on the couch, curled up in blankets with a thermometer sticking out of his mouth as

his father watches the time on his watch. The blond was upstairs, finally getting the kids properly ready since they hadn't gotten the chance to after Soap had thrown up the first time. They had already informed both the daycare and the school of their situation in which they had understood, saying its no problem if the kids are late today.

The thermometer beeps loudly. Its taken from his mouth as Da' looks over the reading, tsking slightly in disapproval at the result. "Yer mother is going tae run her ass doon 'ere soon if ah don't break yer fever," He sighs.

Soap responds, "Seriously. Continue on wit' yer day, Da'. I'll be okay. I am a grown man, ye ken?"

Those blue eyes glare into his soul, seeming to rake through it for any lies while his lips press into a firm line. Dissatisfaction leaks off of him and Soap know that he's already lost the battle before it's even begun. He lets out a loud moan, flopping onto his side in his little blanket cocoon. His dad laughs at this action, mumbling something about dramatics underneath his breath.

Just what needs to happen. More people watching after him and getting sick while he absolutely gets nothing done. He could ask his parents but they're getting up there in age and the malls right now are absolute hell on Earth. This conundrum is really starting to irk him at this point since there seems to be no solution in sight. Sometimes he wishes that his parents had raised him to be a tad bit more selfish because then he wouldn't feel bone crushingly guilty asking someone to finish the last of his shopping for him.

Again. There is no asking Simon. He is not doing that to him. He's been trying to put everything off to the last minute to spare him as little pain as possible, hoping that this won't open up some old barely healed over wounds. It's tough. At one point, he doesn't want Christmas to be a holiday that the kids suddenly don't get to experience anymore since the new parental figure shift. Chris and Anna always went all out for it and it would be a shame if that got ruined for the children.

But at the same time it *is* ruined for Simon.

There's nothing that can be done to take away from the association with this time and it's not something that Johnny ever wants to force on him. So, he's been secretly taking care of all of it alone. The presents, the dinner. Trying to plan out Christmas in a way that

respects all parties involved. That isn't changing over a little stomach bug.

Gaz is hosting the Christmas Eve party while Soap's parents do the Christmas dinner. They all open together at the other former Sergeant's the night before so that Christmas day doesn't get too overwhelming for the little ones when they open their parents' gifts. That's the current idea at least.

Part of him feels sort of guilty about it. Like he's hiding it from Simon or he's treating him differently based off of his trauma. But it's not like he doesn't know that Soap is planning the holiday. He sees him hide the presents in their little hidden weapons closet that the kids will never ever know about and he'll say a quick, "Glad you took my suggestion, sergeant." They had already made a list of gifts together after Leah's birthday considering that they'll be from the both of them even if Simon decides to spend the day locked away in the room like he used to do back when they were on base together.

So really, It's just Soap is doing all the physical running around and planning. Which he doesn't mind. Anything to help.

Two pairs of little feet bound down the stairs followed by heavier footed but careful steps. Ah. The sound of his family. There's a pat on Johnny's leg before the oil stained jeans pass his line of vision. "You stay here with him for right now. I'll get the kids dropped off and try to stop his mother from showing up on your doorstep," His father whispers.

"You're sure?" Simon asks, "What about work?"

"We'll close early for the holidays. I want him all better by the Christmas Eve party so make sure that he actually takes care of himself?"

A slight pause at the mention of that specific day. Then; an awkward cough of, "Always, sir. Thank you. Again."

"Don't mention it." There's laughter and then the sound of rustling of coats, signaling his boyfriend most likely handing off Sophie to her grandfather. Nothing else comes of the interaction for a couple of moments, leaving Soap to stare at the wall in anticipation while feeling like a bomb is coming their way. It hits. The sentence that almost makes even Johnny cry. "We're your family, Simon. That's what we do."

A chorus of goodbyes and I love yous follow the statement, digging it in deeper in a way that most likely would settle painfully in Simon's stomach after the reminder that Christmas is near. The door shuts. Silence. Dreadful silence. The only thing filling the air is Riley's snoring from where he lays in the corner of the living room, absolutely knocked out. He lets the environment be still for a moment longer in hopes that his boyfriend refinds his footing now that they're all gone.

Soap rolls onto his feet, keeping the blanket wrapped around him as he pads over to the archway where Simon stands, frozen. The Scot wordlessly presses his body against his, face nuzzled into the crook of his neck while hoping that the contact will stop him from spiraling down a dark hole. The taller shifts. A limb presses Johnny closer but the rest of him remains as tense as ever. No words pass between them. Just featherlight kisses on a shoulder blade.

They exist in each other's space for a second, forgetting about the fact that Soap is sick and the former lieutenant reeks of a car fluids. Just the two of them in their big old house that was given to them and their heartbeats pressed up against one another's.

"Earlier," Simon swallows, "You had said something about Christmas... What were you talking about?"

Johnny stops breathing at the question. He worries his bottom lip in between his teeth, not entirely sure on how to answer it. On one hand, his partner never asks about something that he doesn't want to know about but on the other he had just been practically slapped in the face with a reminder and he's trying to make all of this easier on him. Not harder.

He should kick throwing up, delirious Soap for that. Really. There's no way that Simon wouldn't ask about it. Not in any universe.

He must've been quiet for too long because he's suddenly a couple of paces away, two hands holding him in place as brown eyes meet his. Yet again, boring into his soul. "I asked you a question, Johnny..."

"I didn't finish Christmas shopping" The brunet blurts, breaking eye contact, "I shouldn't have said it earlier. I know. I was throwing up and sick and worrying so much about the fact that it isn't done and... Anyways, I know this holiday is hard for you, Si. Don't worry about it, okay? I'll figure it out. Probably ask Gaz or something."

And when he looks back over at Simon, his expression is completely

blank. Absolutely void.

It's been so long since Johnny has seen that look on his face and he really wants to go back in time to knock past Soap the fuck out. Triggers happen. He knows that. There's going to be times where they both accidentally trigger each other but each and every time he wants to claw at his body until he's nothing but flayed skin on the ground. It seems so often that it happens.

Johnny just wishes he could reach out and take all of that pain away. Free the love of his life from the chambers of the past, holding him in his arms until everything is alright again. He's not one hundred percent on whether or not the nausea is from anxiously awaiting any type of response after possibly sending his boyfriend into the exact spiral he was trying to avoid or if it's from his stomach fighting him. Either way it's back.

"I'm," Simon manages, arms falling. He clenches his fists and grits his teeth, unable to finish his thought. Soap frowns.

It's only for a second, though. He plasters a comforting smile on his face, mumbling gently, "Mo leannan, don't worry about it. Please. We don't have to think about it right now."

The man in front of him physically deflates, eyes trained on the couch as his head thuds on the archway wall behind him. He can see that deep in those irises, so many mixed feelings battle within despite the emotionless front that's being put up. It worries him to his core. "Simon," He urges, placing his palm on his cheek.

The blond looks at him then, desperation now taking over instead. He's begging for Soap to do something, that much he can see, but he's so uncertain about what it could possibly be. It's gone as soon as it was there though. Now, a hand is placed over his own. "Let's get you upstairs, love. Don't want you to get worse because you're not resting. I did promise your father, after all," The tone is tough. Commanding. More Ghost than Simon.

He allows himself to be ushered up the stairs, unhappy with that outcome.

—

Simon stares at Johnny's sleeping figure from the doorway, tapping impatiently at the doorframe while simultaneously working his jaw around. His gaze dances between his boyfriend and the top drawer of

their nightstand, where the Christmas list is kept. Every time he tries to make a move towards it, however, he can't even twitch a single muscle as his feet remained glued in their place.

It's not a good idea. Johnny is working so hard to make this as easy on him as possible, even offered to stay back with him rather than going to the Christmas Eve party at Gaz's. But Simon doesn't want that. He doesn't even really want the kids to experience Christmas without him but cold, dead hands hold him back. They feel suspiciously like the touch of the one's he lost in the wake of his old comrades, leaving him as an outsider in the current people he loves the most's holiday experience.

No. Not lost. He never lost them. They were ripped away from him before he even got the chance to see if Joseph grew to look more like Beth or Tommy. His nephew was gone and his last Christmas had been...

He lurches forwards, snatching the list out of the dresser and leaning over to smack a kiss onto his partner's heated skin. "You rest, love. Thank you for trying to make this easier on me, I'll try to make it easier on you," He tells him.

As he goes down the stairs, two at a time, he dials a number. It only takes two rings before the person on the other side of the phone answers. "Oi," Simon greets, "Do me a favor and come pick me up?"

They sit outside in the parking lot, watching people bustle in and out of it. Laughing families and stressed parents all trying to get the last of their shopping done before it's too late. Gaz groans, "I hate people. This is going to be hell."

Simon doesn't respond, unease starting to form in the pit of his stomach but he tries to push it down to his best ability. This is a bad idea. A horrible idea, really. One that Soap is definitely going to strangle him for and honestly he should probably turn back around before his mental stability is completely shot to shit.

He unbuckles his seatbelt. The former lieutenant makes a point to take a long moment and stare at his lock screen, which is a picture of Johnny showing the kids something on that damned switch of his with Leah sat on one side of him, Alec the other. Meanwhile, Sophie is sprawled over his back, trying to peak around his shoulder at the game with a tiny fist in his way overgrown mullet-hawk. This is for

them. He'd do anything for them. Anything.

He opens the car door, following Gaz towards the mall entrance. Christmas music plays in his ears.

The burning of his lungs as he runs towards his house.

This is for his children. He'd do anything for his kids. There's a knot forming in his throat as they make their way into the big building, immediately assaulted by the various red and greens along with a man in a Santa costume.

Red. So much red. The air stinks of it.

He sucks in air through his nose, trying to forget the image. Instead, he focuses on the main reason why he's here; how it's founded in nothing but positivity around this cursed time.

Leah's smile when she opens up that friendship bracelet kit that she begged for. She wants to make them for her siblings, that way they'll always be tied together forever. Best friends. His sweet little monster deserves this. He can do this for her.

They make their way towards the first store, his brain not fully comprehending anything that Gaz is currently saying as he speaks. The list is clutched in his hands. The faces around Simon blur.

Their faces, so... horrified. Forever stuck that way. No more life in their eyes.

Alec. Alec wants to be able to express himself creatively too. It could be a good outlet to reduce down his anxiety that he had been recently diagnosed with. A way to cope.

The lights are too bright and they're shining in his eyes. They dangle from a tree, producing a shine on the ornaments and tinsel stretched around to decorate the gigantic pine.

The fucking tree. It was still lit. Broken ornaments crunch underneath his feet.

His lungs begged for air and now his eyes darted around the other citizens. Sometimes one looked a little too familiar to him, causing him to have to squeeze his eyes shut and remember that it's not who he thinks it is. But could it be—Where is he? Why is he here? Think.

This is Sophie's first Christmas.

That was Joseph's last Christmas.

He can't. He just can't. Everything's moving like jello but yet so fast at the same time, each human doesn't seem real to him. Nothing does. His heart beats dangerously against his ribcage as he stumbles backwards, bumping into some poor woman while another figure reaches out a hand to her in a seemingly apologetic manner.

His breath comes out ragged. As if his throat was clogged up, preventing him from getting any oxygen. The smell of earth fills his nose now and there's a pain at his neck, like nails dragging against his skin.

Why is he suffocating again? It's too bright to be underground. More of that metallic smell embraces him and he feels his knees buckle at the toy plane taking over his vision. "Simon!" Joseph cries. But it couldn't be Joseph because the boy is dead.

He doesn't process being moved. Just one second it was entirely too crowded and then out of nowhere, he's sitting in an empty hallway with a bottle clenched into his hands. "- Mall in some bloody hall. You back yet, mate?" Someone asks, "Deep breaths. You got it, big guy. The floor is linoleum I'm guessing? Maybe some stone? I don't know. M' not very good at this."

He knows that person. Those kind brown eyes meeting his with so much concern that it almost shocks his system back into place. That's someone that he can trust. Gaz. He takes a deep breath in, slowly exhaling afterwards while ripping the mask off of his face since it was entirely too much for Simon at the moment.

Once he's able to breathe again, he takes a sip of the water and almost laughs at the symbolism of him now being the one sitting on the dirty floor with trembling hands clutched around a dumb water bottle.

Gaz presses, "Solid?"

All Simon does in response is nod, breathing out an uneven breath as those same images flash behind his eyelids once again. It causes him to jolt. His friend reaches out to keep him in place with his eyes the size of golfballs. The scent of blood won't leave his senses as he has to bury his face into his knees to try to hide from it, squeezing his eyes shut once again in hopes that when he opens them again he will wake from this nightmare.

"Simon," Someone says. It sounds so much like his mother. But it's not really fully there. It's more of a whisper from long ago, echoey in his ears rather than an actual solid noise. She repeats, "Simon."

It's so warm and inviting. He wishes that he could slip back into her arms once again; to escape the violence that has followed him all of his life by simply being in her grasp. So gentle. So loving. He'd drown in it. But without warning, it all morphs unexpectedly. All he can see are those glazed over eyes along with her jaw stretched in a permanent—

"Ghost!"

He snaps his head up, once again coming back to where he was. On the floor of a mall in some empty hallway that probably leads to bathrooms, a back exist, or a staff only room. Curled up in a ball like a scared child. He blinks. Gaz is now beyond distressed as he moves his gaze over Ghost's current state with an hesitant outstretched hand hovering over him and it's at that moment that he realizes that his cheeks feel damp. Was he crying? "Ghost," Gaz whispers to himself, "Okay, we're going to use Ghost for right now then. We can handle that right?"

Ghost's eyes maybe be looking at his sergeant but it's more of a past him. He isn't entirely in control of his one word as he lets out, "Didn't really call me by that. That's why it works."

That seems to confuse the Gaz. "What?" He interrogates.

Where's Johnny? Johnny would understand. Ghost wants to be with him. He feels himself crash into his body all at once as panic seeps back into him. Why was it Kyle that was comforting him? This isn't usually what he does. This is Soap's job usually. It's an unspoken thing that the Scot is the one that finds him during these types of unfortunate occasions. He's enough aware now to know that he wasn't in that house or the ground but rather something had full throttled sent him back. Something had triggered it. Something horrible.

Oh, God. Where was Johnny?

"Johnny. Where's Johnny?" Ghost cries out, starting to try and push past Gaz but fails as he pushes right back, forcing the lieutenant into a sitting position.

"At home, mate. He's sick, remember? Been throwing up all morning but completely safe...And definitely going to be very upset with me

when he finds out that I led you into having a mental breakdown in the middle of a shopping centre."

They're in a mall, right. Why are they here? He turns his head towards where they had probably came from, searching for any type of clue that will lead him back to the present and clear his boggled mind that seems to be stuck in some weird in between. His vision zeros in on a bag that has Santa's face on it. It causes his ears to finally focus in on the cheery Christmas music blasting throughout the entirety of the building.

That would explain it.

It all comes back to him and he feels himself fall into a pit of newfound exhaustion. Johnny is home sick. He had stressed about not being able to get the Christmas presents earlier and Simon wanted to prove to himself that he had gotten better on some weird impulse. But... It wasn't a weird impulse, though. It was for his children. Leah, Alec, and Sophie.

He just wanted them to have a good Christmas. They didn't deserve to have it be spoiled too. Death didn't deserve to have that grip over them like it does him, taking away something that's meant to be so happy and replacing it with the reminder of once was but never will be again since they are gone. He just wanted better for them. He groans, "Did we even make it to the first store, Garrick?"

"No, sir," Gaz hesitates, "We didn't..."

He runs a hand over his face, allowing the failure to set over him. Simon finally fully becomes grounded. The hair is thick with a tension that hadn't been there earlier and he feels kind of guilty for being the reason that it's there, despite know this was entirely out of his control. Stupid idea indeed.

Quietly, his friend starts, "I'm really sorry, Ghost. If I had known it was too crowded—"

"Not your fault. Wasn't the crowd. Good guess, though. I do have to give you that," The blond sighs, hanging his head. His lungs still ache from the workout that he had put them through and his head is spinning with a new headache that surely won't go away until he finally allows himself to rest. The comedown always sucks. Sure, the thick of it might've passed but that doesn't mean he won't feel the effects for the rest of the day.

Simon licks his lips. Then adds, "Christmas really isn't a good time for me."

He chances a glance at the man, watching realization spread across his features as he awkwardly scratches the nape of his neck. There's his own form of regret in those eyes. "Sorry then for not remembering," Gaz murmurs.

"No, I knew better. None of this is your fault."

They sit in silence as the two mull it over in their heads, letting themselves have a moment to process everything that had just happened: Simon especially. The people move on as if nothing occurred. Continuing their shopping frenzies as they fight over items and argue in frustration with cashiers. In their defense, to them, nothing had. This was something that doesn't effect other people like it does him and it just feels as if this hurtle will be one that could never be crossed. He's partly grateful for that. Other times, however, it's so lonely on this side of the glass.

He wishes he could change it. To go back in time. Then maybe, just maybe, the kids would've seen Joseph as his older and cool cousin while Tommy spoiled them rotten. His mother would certainly be so intrusive. Probably worse than Johnny's actually.

Still, they would've been known. They would still be there and any day he'd take his mum showing up on his doorstep with some dinner that she had made as she claimed that she had been "in the neighborhood" despite the neighborhood being Scotland. Maybe she would've followed him. Simon's sure in any lifetime, he would've ran after Soap. He knows that rest of his family would've followed.

His old family combining with his new. A dream that may exist in some other universe. He just happens to be the unlucky bastard where it hadn't.

But just to have them? To hold them? For Tommy to tease him about liking Scots while Beth shows Soap how to make a stubborn toddler eat their vegetables or tricks on how to help with colic back when Sophie was nothing but a one month old with a very upset stomach. They could've had it all.

So why doesn't he?

"Ghost," Gaz clears his throat, "If you had known that this could've been a possibility... Why did you do it?"

At this point the shorter man has now settled down in the spot next to him, just far enough so they aren't touching. He lazily rolls his head over to get a good look at his former subordinate who is staring right back with an expression that relayed nothing but openness. Simon laughs humorlessly, "The same reason we do everything now. For our kids."

God, he had failed them this time. He really had. But at least he tried and he's sure that that counts for something at least. He forces his vision back onto the wall, glaring at it so hard that there should probably be a hole in it.

He tried. At least he tried. Even if it wasn't good enough.

He tried back then too. He really did.

And he's immensely sorry to both past and present families for who he is.

"You know, Ghost," Gaz ponders out loud, tone gentle and careful, "You're good enough for them. No one expects you to be some hero that swoops in and fixes their problems all of the time. Sometimes, it's going to be you that goes through things and they will always understand. I never really understood what Soap saw in you back when we were Sergeants, if I'm honest. I thought it was all purely physical.

"I thought to myself: how could he be so in love with a man that has the personality of a rock? No offense—"

Simon cuts him off with a deep growl, "Oh of course. None taken. Fucking thanks, ya slag. Exactly what I needed right now."

He could feel more than see the way that Gaz had rolled his eyes. "Will you just let me finish, you big old grump? Fuckin hell, Simon."

"As you were, then."

"Thank you," The other quips sarcastically. He takes a breath and makes a show of adjusting in his seat as the coat on his shoulders rustles with every movement. Simon wishes he could make him run laps again. These two sergeants have gotten way too comfortable messing with him as if he's lost all of his bite that made him Lieutenant Simon "Ghost" Riley.

But maybe Gaz was trying to rile him up as some weird attempt at a

reminder of who he is. How strong he is. He wouldn't put it past him. The kid is quite smart. Then, he continues, "I never saw it. Not until the day Soap had missed someone after a sweep and you had tackled him right as the hostile shot. That wasn't all, either. When I had look at you, bleeding out all over the ground, your eyes never once left him.

"You were so panicked. So scared. I could see it in your little eyeholes. But I don't think it was for yourself— Not based on the way your eyes had scanned over Soap multiple times as if you were assessing him for any injuries. You were actively dying and you were still so worried about saving *him*."

Simon hardly remembers that day. The only recollection he had was a blind panic, pain, and then waking up in the infirmary days later with a very angry Scottish man glaring at him as he slept. That time was a fight. It went on for quite a bit with them defending their cases; Soap's being that he could've died and Ghost's being that this is what his job had been.

Although, he knew it was way more personal than that in his heart.

Soap had immediately backed down when Ghost had finally barked out an, "You would've done the same for me, Johnny! So drop it." And there had been so much anger Aimee his way but a deep understanding of the truth. The sergeant would've done the same. So, he had dropped it. At that moment he could only open and close his mouth before groaning in frustration and flinging himself backwards in his chair, arms crossed.

But even then, Johnny stayed by his side the whole time. Ghost had figured out that his sergeant had gotten a little too close due to this and he wasn't the only one. Price had called him into his office after he had been fully healed and reminded him of what could happen if the higher ups found out about the fraternization— Especially considering he was his boss. The look on the captain's face had been priceless (no pun intended) after he had found out about the fact that there was none of that actively going on.

Now he's most likely going to be getting married to the fucker.

"You're protective," Gaz continues, interrupting his thoughts, "You're loyal. You try your best to make everything easier on everyone else but yourself. You need to let Soap do the same for you because you don't have to protect him, Simon. The danger is gone. You're not his

higher up anymore; you're his partner and he knows you couldn't do this."

The man shakes the list for dramatic effect. Simon glowers at the damned thing as the sound of it flapping in the air mocks him. "And there's nothing wrong with you not being able to. I don't know what your thing is with this holiday but it's obviously not just a simple bah humbug Grinch situation. I would've done this for the lot of you— For you specifically— In a heartbeat. No complaints. You have people in your corner and we're willing to catch you. You have to let us. You have to let me. I'm not just here for Soap, Simon. I fuckin' love you, mate.

"You're my family just as much as he is. Even though you make it harder for everyone that's not your boyfriend or your kids to get close to you, I still love you. We've been through literal war together. So you're going to march your old, stubborn ass back out to that car park and let me do you a solid."

The amount of strength in his voice shocks Simon to his core— Especially since it was directed at him. No room for any nonsense, any bullshit whatsoever. There's a look of determination across those features, eyebrows furrowed together and gaze as hard as stone. Simon couldn't help the small smirk on his face— Both of pride and at the opportunity of a jab. "You better watch what you say," The blond jokes, "Johnny will kick your ass for confessing your love to me."

There's a shove against his arm, causing him to let out a snort of amusement. "That's enough out of you," Gaz retorts back. Simon shakes his head, trying to keep back the laughter bubbling over the anxiety that had been trying to devour him whole as he stands with a grunt. His joints pop in the process.

"Not a word, sergeant," He barks out, stalking down the hallway where he's almost one hundred percent sure an exit will be, "Callin' my therapist to come keep me company. Don't fuck this up, Garrick."

Gaz calls after him, "I won't!" There's a distinct smugness in his voice that has Simon sighing in discontent before he hears footsteps walking the opposite way of him.

"I tried, right? Would you count this as exposure therapy or whatever?" Simon teases, inhaling from the cigarette Dr. Gerber had given him after rushing over here.

"Actually," the older man frowns in thought, "Maybe? But really, I would say that it was impulsive and not really well thought out, though the thought behind it was well intentioned. Maybe your husband is starting to rub off on you a bit."

The Englishman lets some laughter slip past his lips along with the smoke. In result, he gets a kind smile from the therapist who seems to still be thinking heavily on how to navigate this emergency meeting situation. In all honesty, Simon hadn't expected him to drive all the way out here to come check on him considering that he had told him he was fine now and mostly needed a distraction.

He supplies in good heart, "Not my husband yet, Doc."

"Right. Forgot you two aren't actually married yet. In my head, you always have been... Which leads me into the serious part of this gathering," Dr. Gerber preps, turning to face him fully from where they leaned up against the car, "Your friend was right. There is nothing wrong with not being able to celebrate this holiday. Your loved ones have been in your life for how long now? They've already accepted that this is something that you struggle with and although I'm all for healing and taking back your life; things like this take time. You aren't just going to suddenly be able to go full Christmas out of nowhere."

Simon looks away, kicking his foot against the tire as some sort of distraction away from this conversation. Deep down, he knew his therapist was right. He's not going to be able to bounce back from this that easily. Even now, he can still feel their soulless eyes on him, watching him from the shadows as they beg for recognition.

For some type of justice. For accountability.

For Simon to finally admit out loud that it was his fault that it had happened. They want him back just as much as he longs to be with them again as they reach forwards with their rotting hands from the darkness, snuffing out the joy from this timeframe. Instead all that there is them.

Even though all he wants is for their to just be Leah, Sophie, and Alec. To finally let go of this all so that they can never know the darkness surrounding this holiday for all of them— for their father.

It makes no difference to Johnny if he is there or not. Sure, his boyfriend would love to put on matching Christmas pajamas and wrap presents all night with the title of "Santa" on the from sticker as they

eat the cookies that the kids had left for the fake, jolly old myth. But he understands that's not in the cards. He accepts it.

But the kids? Will they understand it? Or will they sit looking at that empty spot on the couch where he should be, only to be reminded of the other people who aren't there too. It's their first Christmas without their parents and he's surprised that they've been so adamant about keeping up with traditions; though he supposes that's their way of coping.

He doesn't want to be the reminder.

"It's not about Gaz or Price," He admits, "Hell, it's not even really about Johnny. He gets it. It's more about..." He cuts himself off, setting his jaw and taking an especially aggressive hit off the stick while he positions himself to lean against the car once again. Simon can't even say it. He can't fail them.

Realization washes onto the older's face as he nods, "It's about your children."

"It's always about my children. This whole debacle was about them. If I'm not able to pull it together before Christmas Eve then they're going to wonder why I'm not there. Why I didn't show up when they need me," He starts. Now that he's going, though he can't stop. He pushes himself off the vehicle, begging to pace around.

"This is their first Christmas without their parents. I've had years without my family. They need me to be their rock. I'm perfectly fine with Johnny taking over and planning all of this. It's like Gaz said; they're just happy to have me here. So I don't have to be the king of fuckin' Christmas as long as my children see that I'm *there*."

The therapist chews on his lip, eyes watching the taller man that was now walking back and forth like a caged lion. It's no doubt a tough situation to be in. For sure hard to navigate even with decades of experience in the mind dissecting career.

After what feels like forever, he makes his way over to Simon and places his hands on both of his shoulders to stop him in his tracks. His eyes shine with earnesty as he instructs him, "So ease into it. I really want you to be careful, Simon and I'd rather you take little steps. Remember what happened today when you pushed too far. I'm always a call away if you need anything. Don't force it. Ease."

Ease. He makes his way up to their house, Gaz helping carry some presents. Johnny is sat in the living room and as soon as the door opens, he turns around to say something but stops before it even comes out of his mouth. "What in the fuck..." He trails off.

Gaz sets the bags down before comically waving and leaving them to their own devices without a word, obviously afraid of what Soap's reaction will be to hearing today's events. The whole car ride home, the poor lad had been fidgeting like Alec does whenever he has to use the bathroom and is trying to hold it because he wants to keep playing (he is potty training.) Every couple of minutes, he'd murmur, "You don't get how he gets with you. He's going to kill me, mate." Or something along those lines.

So it's not surprising that he left Simon to fend for himself.

"How're you feeling, love?" He tries.

"Simon."

The Scot is now haphazardly throwing the blankets off of himself, rushing over clumsily to look in the many bags. Two things; One, Simon may have called Gaz and told him to buy other things that weren't on the list. Two, he definitely did that. So now, the kids have stacks that were way larger than originally planned on top of the whole ending up on the ground of the mall with a panic attack after he was specifically told not to worry about it for that exact reason.

He flashes his teeth innocently at his boyfriend with that thought. But Johnny isn't looking at him, instead he's spinning around slowly to take in all of the gifts with wide eyes and his mouth slacked, the oversized grey sweatpants that were definitely Simon's being the only sound in the room. "What did you do...?" He asks.

As soon as the words leave his mouth, he turns to his partner with narrowed eyelids in an accusatory manner. He repeats more slowly, "What did you do?"

"Exactly what I was told not to do."

"I can see that, Simon!" Soap exclaims before covering his his mouth, continuing to stare in shock at the absolute masses of never-ending Christmas bags. There's a slight rumble in his chest that sounds on the verge of impressed and equally stressed from the sight.

Without warning, Johnny spins on his heels again. Concern was

written all over him as he finally put together the fact that Simon had been with Gaz and had very obviously gone shopping. For the holiday that his family had passed on. "Wait— Si...You solid?" He questions.

That's a loaded one, isn't it? As of right now? He feels better since it had gotten done and now the man he loves isn't stressing about not having enough but rather too many. At the same time, however, he feels like he was put through the wringer. All he wants to do is forget about what had happened earlier and try to follow his therapist's advice but there's also the fact of what Gaz had told him. They're a team. He needs to let Johnny fully catch him. So he responds simply and honestly.

"No."

Soap shuffles forwards, whispering softly, "Coke here."

His demeanor had quickly changed from one of shocked distress to a soft spot to land. Simon chases after it, leaning forwards to allow those two strong arms to wrap around him and hold him tightly. "You did so good, love. Thank you. You didn't have to do this but I'm proud of you. Thank you so much," The Scot murmurs, bringing up a hand to cuff the back of his head.

Simon lets himself be caught.

—

Christmas Eve rolls around and somehow, as if a miracle, Soap had finally gotten over being sick without passing it on to anyone else in their family. To say that today had been hectic was definitely an understatement since it mostly consisted of them running around and trying to get three unruly children ready for a party they were way too excited for.

In the end, Simon had decided to go. It had been a long debate in his head as he thought about all of the easing talk but honestly everyone he loves is going to be there. It's going to be hard as hell and he's going to be emotionally exhausted by the end of the night but seeing everyone may just be worth it. Sometimes he really starts to wonder who possessed his body. Since when was a crowded party worth it?

Since these three little angels came into his life—

His thought is cut short by Sophie kicking her feet as he attempted to put her dress shoes on them, giggling loudly in the process. Leah looks

over from where Johnny was busy braiding a sectioned part of her front part with bobby pins being held between his teeth so that he can clip the two parts into the red bow besides him once he's done. She raising her eyebrow at the scene.

"Sophie," Simon says, warning to his tone. It's lighter than the one he used to use with recruits, that's, for sure, but usually does the trick with Alec and Leah. Not this one.

No, instead the little Johnny mini-me decides to press his buttons even further. She places two hands on his cheeks, using them as leverage to pull herself forwards before placing her mouth to his forehead and raspberrying the skin there. Then, flops back onto the couch, rolling on her front to try to stand and make her escape. Alec laughs from his spot on the floor since he was all ready to go.

Simon wipes the saliva from his once oh so clean forehead and reaches to bring her back to a sitting position. She lets out a sound of protest, trying to pull away. When that fails, she tries to deadweight herself. Once she figures out that this won't work either due to him literally raising her and being privvy to how she behaves sometimes, she lets out a huff and allows him to put the shoes on.

Her lip is jutted out in a pout as she watches him. Every once in a while he'll look up at her to find her staring at him already. When they make eye contact, she exaggerates the expression: a last attempt of trying to get her way. Nada.

One thing that she is always good for; providing him with a much needed distraction. Oftentimes she likes having their full undivided attention and will act out for it or try to be silly to make them laugh. He shifts his gaze to Johnny who is entirely too concentrated at the task at hand. Leah smiles at the father dealing with her menace of a little sister, giving a thumbs up. He nods to her and then turns back to Sophie.

He's finished putting her shoes on but now she's refusing to move. Simon bends so that their eyes meet again, his lips in an exaggerated open mouth grin. That curiosity burns brightly in her blues as she watches him pick a foot and show it to her. "Shiny," He informs her.

She gasps loudly, babbling excitedly at the seemingly new development of her dress shoes having a shine to them. Helps having two dads that used to be military. "Ah!" Sophie exclaims, putting her foot in his face.

"I see. I see. Fun right?"

"Da!" She screams, swiveling herself around to show Soap, "Da!"

The other man looks up, using that time to take a pin out of his mouth. Their youngest starts pointing towards the footwear, jabbering happily about something completely unintelligible since she's hardly even one years old yet.

Johnny pulls his lips upwards, saying, "I see. Very pretty, princess. See, they're not so bad, right?"

She slides off of the couch, bunching up her dress in the process. Simon stops her before she can go too far, pulling down the fabric so it doesn't get stuck in her white stockings and she looks presentable rather than the wild child she is. Sophie turns to him, squinting in a calculating way.

He urges on, "Yes?"

She sighs, throwing herself into his arms and squishing his cheeks together once again. This kid really has a thing for messing with faces. Sophie giggles at the expression that she had created on her caretakers face, bouncing up and down in excitement. She turns her head back to her siblings, letting out an enthused, "Le! Le! Aec!"

Soap freezes his hands, slowly bringing his head upwards to the scene. Simon meets his eyes, his own face screwed up into disbelief to its best ability. Leah seems to catch onto the fact that their little sister wanted her and Alec's attention since she kicked him lightly before gesturing to her expectant gaze. At first the little boy had seemed annoyed but then once he saw, he bursts into a howling laughter.

"Sophie!" He shriek, clutching his stomach. This seems to please her as tries to jump again without her feet actually leaving the floor.

"Daddy looks silly," The oldest giggles, "Very silly."

Meanwhile, they were too busy focusing on the fact that she had just said her siblings' names— or attempted to— for the first time ever. They snap themselves out of it, continuing to get their children ready for the party.

—

"Ho! Ho! Ho! I heard there are some kids on the nice list here?" A loud

voice echo's through Gaz's house. All four children halt in their tracks at the sound, eyes focused on the doorway where Price stands dressed in a Santa costume with a red sack slung over his shoulder. Simon hears Soap snort from where he sat besides him, nestled securely under his arm.

A loud wolf whistle comes from the other side of the room from where Gaz stood with a mischievous gleam in his eyes. "Looking good, Santa!" He jokes.

The captain chooses to ignore him to instead focus on the kids now staring at him like he had come down from the sky on a flying unicorn. Adeline points, leaning backwards to make sure that Callie can see what's going on and the woman responds by pulling her closer to whisper, "Is that Santa?"

"Santa" comes in and places the sack on the ground, scratching dramatically at his beard in mock inquisitiveness. Simon can't lie to himself, the act does make a tiny smirk form on his face as he pulls Johnny closer to him to allow his boyfriend to hide his face in his shoulder. Cackling was brimming up in the man. He could tell by how tense he had gotten underneath his fingertips along with how his shoulders were moving up and down with barely concealed amusement.

"Johnny. Shh," He murmurs quiet enough for only them to hear. The other man nods, trying his hardest to not let it out considering that it would probably cause Price to bicker with him resulting in at least Leah figuring out who it was over her childlike wonder.

"Okay!" Their former captain huffs, "I have some presents here for some kids on the nice list! I wonder who that could possibly be." As chaos erupts from that statement, Simon takes time to notice the way that the older man is beaming in a way that he's never quite seen before. It dawns on him then that Price and him were similar. He never got the chance to have a family of his own with how wrapped up with the military he had been throughout his youth. It's how he got to where he is now. Maybe the 141 was all that he had too at one point and now theres a whole bunch of little ones running around that he could spoil.

It warms his heart. The idea that they could provide this type of life for him; for each other actually, is something that the blond will always appreciate. Even if he doesn't say it out loud.

Soap finally seems to get a hold of himself, lifting his face off Simon's shoulder and pulling his lips in his mouth in some form of a pokerface. The dress shirt on him is tight enough to where it hugs his body just right in the ways that drive him absolutely mad. So, he indulges himself a once over.

Seeming to notice this, Johnny reaches out and shoves his face away lightly while being careful not to break their contact. "Keep yer heid, Simon," He breathes, shaking his head. There's no annoyance in his tone, rather the exact opposite of it. There's a jesting lilt to the way that it's spoken and Simon just shrugs in response.

"I'm not allowed to think you look nice?"

It doesn't even really occur to him that he hadn't needed a moment to try to figure out what Johnny had said to him. That it just automatically translated in his brain. He had immediately knew that he was being told to basically keep calm.

The blush that occurs on his boyfriend's face is nothing short of pretty. It's probably a deeper red than the color of Leah's dress.

He doesn't really understand the idea of dressing the children or themselves up for this occasion but looking around, it seems as if it was the right thing to do. Even little Adeline is in a nice outfit. Can't say that he doesn't appreciate seeing Johnny in this attire, though and he's going to let that be known. "Didn't know I could make you blush like that anymore," He pokes fun, "Thought you were surely unphased by my flirting now. Used to it, perhaps is a better word?"

Soap immediately hisses back, "I am." Though, they both know that it's far from the truth if the darkening hue on his face is anything to go by.

Before Simon can make fun of him a bit more, Mrs. MacTavish comes over to them and sits down on the cushion next to her son. Soap brings up a hand to entangle their fingers together followed by a quick kiss onto his scarred knuckles. She turns to them with a large grin and states wistfully, "Young love." Both men blink at her then each other.

"Ma, we are both way past 'young love' at this point," He chuffs while turning back to her. His eyes were blank as she throws her head back to laugh like he had said something totally ridiculous to her. The older woman settles, maneuvering her body so that she was fully facing him.

"Tell me that when your my age and he starts snoring so loud that your neighbors down the street can hear it," Isla replies, slapping her son's knee, "You'll still love the bastard, though."

Simon felt offended. They were talking about him as if he wasn't right here. He snorts, "I actually think your son is going to be the one that snores. Already does. Just quietly. Kind of adorable."

"Gets that from his father."

Now it was Soap's turn to stare at them both dejectedly, mouth formed into an 'o' of disbelief. He turns to his mother and starts listing off all of the reasons why he doesn't snore rather than accepting that he, in fact, does. Also, how even if he did, it wouldn't be 'adorable' it would be 'manly' as if there was a way to snore in a manly way.

Simon distracted away from the conversation by a tiny tug on his sleeve. He twists his head to see which of his three children were the culprit, unsurprisingly seeing that it was Alec. He had a nervous demeanor to him, playing with his own fingers as he darted his gaze around the group of people. "You alright?" His father urges, furrowing his brows together.

The little boys waves his hand, signaling for Simon to lean down to his height which he quickly obliges. There's a little squeak of, "I'm hungry."

He pulls away to make eye contact. "You want food? You could've just asked," He responds gently, "It's alright." Alec shrugs at the suggestion, spinning his body back and forth while he scans over all of the people that had empty hands aside from maybe some glasses of eggnog or soda. So it was the fact that he doesn't want to be the only one. Got it. Anxiety thing.

"Come on. Lets go get some food, alright? I'm a bit hungry myself," He grunts, standing and detaching himself from Johnny. The man looks at him for split second in confusion but then sees that he's picking up Alec off of the ground to placing him on his hip and seems to understand.

While passing Leah, who was interrogating the poor Santa into admitting that he was her Grandpa Price, he places a hand on her head to direct his vision to him. She lets out a laugh at that. "You hungry, monster?"

"No!" She giggles.

She rips herself away from his touch, instead jumping on Price's lap and saying, "I know it's you!" Suspicion leaks off of her voice as she leans in closely to inspect his face with narrowed eyes. Simon falters his steps a bit, wondering if he should leave him to the wolves like this or if this was something that needed to be corrected. However, his captain lifts up his palm. A quiet gesture that he was fine.

That leaves him walking away with an amused exhale to make his way towards Adeline, Callie, and Sophie before crouching down in front of his daughter that had been busy showing off her shoes to them. Her and things that shine. "You hungry, love?" He asks her.

"Tes!" She stands, trying to climb onto him. Her shoe falls off in the process and she takes a moment to stare at the item thunking on the floor to go, "Uh oh."

Simon repeats back to her, "Uh oh!" He's heard that helps with the development of words, right? Either way, he does it. He puts Alec fully onto solid ground as he grabs the footwear to put it back on her. Addy waves at the little boy causing him to turn around and hide his face into his dad's arm, obviously not in the mood for being sociable. It does cause a pang of worry to strike into him.

Callie shoots him a look that reveals that she feels the same. Alec is their quietest child but he's not usually shy like this. He'll still make eye contact with people and smile or wave while playing with his toys. He still talks too. It's very limited, though. When Simon had first come to this family, he spoke in broken sentences and Soap had told him that it's because of the fact that he's very nonverbal. He enjoys being quiet.

It's probably why he looks up to Simon so much. Another silent person in the clan of loud MacTavishes. But at the end of the day, his fretting is ceased by the reminder that Alec hadn't grabbed Soap but rather him. When he's feeling upset, he goes to his other dad most of the time since he's better at navigating those types of things. Plus, the first panic attack he had ever had, Johnny had been his main support system so it makes sense that that's what he looks for. Simon doesn't mind that. Of course he doesn't.

He slides Sophie's shoe back on and then picks both children up in one sweep, avoiding toppling over with ease. The two seem to enjoy it since they laugh. "How do you do that?" Callie astonishes.

"Military."

"Right," She states, nodding, "Let's head to the dining room, yeah. I think I should probably feed Addy too."

The party passes on with ease. Simon has avoided looking at any of the Christmas decor in fear that it will trigger him. The only exception was Santa Claus Price. It had been a funny sight more than a sad one to him, however. Sadly, he had taken it off long ago, leaving all of his former subordinates without any form of free entertainment.

But even now as they open presents, Simon keeps his eyes off of the tree and instead tries to mentally convince himself that it's all one big group birthday. It's hardly working.

He could feel the sweat building on his forehead and the way that his hands twitch every once in a while before he has to clasp them into fists. The blond swallows, trying to keep his eyes open so that a series of flashbacks doesn't form behind his eyes. A palm touches his face, guiding his line of sight away from Adeline currently ripping through the wrapping paper with her parents helping her.

"Still here?" Johnny ribs, irises darting back and forth as he searches his eyes. Simon lets out a slow breath through his nose, it passing over his lips due to the mask followed by a simple nodding. It was as good as they were going to get.

Afterwards, he tried his best to focus on what she got rather than why she was getting it which proved to help some. Her obvious excitement towards each and every item was prevalent as she didn't have a good grasp on which thing she wanted once it was all laid out in front of her.

Next up was Sophie, leaving both Simon and Johnny no choice but to settle down on the floor with her to assist. Although, he's guess that she'll understand the gist considering she had tried to steal literally all of Leah's presents on her birthday. This theory was proven correct when Price places her present down in front of them and she tries to lurch forwards to grab at it. The whole family to simultaneously yell out a, "Woah, woah, woah!" Before Soap is able to pull her back again, teeth gritted in an awkward smile.

Sophie pouts at that.

Once again; his chaotic daughter comes to the rescue and distracts him from his own mind. Many pictures happen throughout the

experience of all three kids ripping through their presents, each eagerly holding up what they got one by one for both Simon and Soap along with the cameras. Adults open all at once. By the time they're leaving, their car's trunk is filled with gifts and the kids have to even hold some.

Johnny shoots him a look that's conveyed as, *"See. Now what the hell are we going to do with this plus everything we have?"*

Before they are able to make their leave, though, Soaps parents make them pose for the a family photo for the yearly Christmas album. At first Simon had tried to let the three generations of MacTavishes have their moment but is immediately yanked by the wrist by Clara. "Big fuckin oaf. Get in 'ere!" She shrilled.

Johnny beamed at him so brightly, reaching out to fix the mask that had apparently started to fall down from his face. When satisfied, his boyfriend brought his full attention down to their children, using his hand to huddle them in front of them in a way that sort of reminds him of penguins from those wilderness documentaries that Leah finds herself completely engrossed in. I'm the corner of the room, Price stands with his arms crossed against his chest. His misty eyes were trained on Simon and mouth curled into a shaky smile. The feeling of a hand clapping onto his shoulder changes his course of attention though as Clyde curtly nods to him.

"Say 'cheese!'" Gaz says, holding up the camera for them.

He tries not to think about

He has never been so excited to walk through the doors of his house before. Alec was passed out on his shoulder while Leah trudged behind them, dragging her feet against the stone walkway. Johnny was in front of them with the youngest kid, going through the keys with his spare hand to find the one that unlocks the door. They all came to the agreement that they'll get the stuff out of the car tomorrow since everyone was equally exhausted.

As soon as they're in the door, Johnny turns to whisper to Leah in a voice barely audible, "Straight to bed, okay?"

All she manages is a nod. The little girl slips off her shoes and hugs both of their waists briefly before shuffling away with a tiny, "Night. Love you."

“Love you,” They coo back to her. Once sure that she’s gone, Soap whirls to face his boyfriend. They’re silent for a couple of seconds as they allow themselves a second to just breathe after the eventful night. Simon unhooks the mask to set it down on the shelf that doubles as coat hanger, slipping off his shoes and attempting to keep Alec steady in the process.

Next to him, Johnny does the same. Well, minus the mask. No communication needs to pass between them during moments like this since they are so entangled together at this point, he isn’t sure where either of them had once ended or began. The sound of the light switch clicking on the soft yellow light is the only disturbance between their tranquility. It continues this way even as the Scot hands over their daughter to him so that he can get both children up to bed presumably while he sets up shop down here.

Simon starts to walk away but is stopped by a gentle touch on his chest. “I’ll be up in a bit. Don’t wait up,” Johnny purrs, getting up on the tips of his toes to press a light but lingering kiss on his lips. When detached, the blond blinks.

“Johnny—“

“It’s okay. I promise. I can finish wrapping by myself. Go on up to bed.”

And yet again, he’s standing there dumbly wondering how he could’ve possibly gotten so lucky when it comes to choosing someone to spend the rest of his life with. How someone like him every got someone like *that*. On their way home, he had wordlessly checked in multiple times to see how Simon had been doing after the party.

Truth was, he doesn’t know. If he was a more emotionally intelligent man, he would’ve already guessed by now that he was pulling something from the Ghost handbook and shoving down everything. That it was festering just beneath the surface. Atlas, though, he was Simon Riley which means that repression comes as a second nature to him and was only amplified by the selfless need for the kids having a good holiday after their parents’ death earlier on in the year.

Which, thankfully, they’ve seemed to have been doing surprisingly well with. Especially Leah. He quickly gets out of the thought of death though, not liking the feeling of *something* clawing it’s way up his throat.

He steps furrows his eyebrows at Johnny for a couple of seconds,

taking in the tiredness. He frowns, “But—“

The shorter man reaches out, grabbing his cheeks and pulling him downwards until their foreheads press together. “It’s alright,” He informs soberly, “Go get some rest.”

They pull apart and Simon trudges towards the stairs, hesitance. But Soap only offers him that genuine smile, indicating that everything was okay.

He lasted twenty minutes. Only twenty. Simon had tossed and turned, trying to listen to his partner that had been doing nothing but trying to ease the load on him this whole time— despite his best attempts at making it harder on himself as it seems. But the guilt was too much. It was only an emotion he experienced when it came to his immediate family and when he did it was beyond soul crushing. So he throws the blanket off of him and heads back down the stairs.

Johnny abruptly comes into view before he even makes it, eyes wild. Simon startles. Upon realizing that it was him rather than one of their little monsters, he slumps in relief. Then, tenses back up just as fast. “Wait, what are you—“

“Helping,” He answers, fully walking down the stairs now. Soap stutters at that. In the meantime, the taller man grabs the plate of cookies off of the counter and extends his hand while looking back at his partner expectantly.

Johnny lets out a sigh, slapping his limb into his in defeat. Though, there is a small smirk pulling on his lips as he allows himself to be tugged back towards the living room.

There’s not much else to do, considering that the other man had spent a majority of his time sick wrapping just to get it done. They sit with the cookie plate in between them as they each snack through the whole ordeal wordlessly, soft music playing from Soap’s phone. Thankfully, not Christmas. At some point, Simon feels his entire body starting to have tremors and the sweat builds up again, a far distant feeling of doom trying its best to loom over him once again.

He shoves it down with a push of a present underneath the stack meant for Leah, hiding it away once again with breath of air that’s meant to come off as nothing but a sound he felt the urge to make. Johnny knows him better than that. “What do you call a snowman

with a six pack?" The man asks, shifting his attention onto him from the corner of his eyes as a smug look crosses on his face.

Simon lets out an amused huff, licking his lips before glancing back at his boyfriend with a bored, half-lidded stare. "What, love?"

"An abdominal snowman."

An actual genuine laugh passes through him along with this strange surge of pride at that one. Sue him, it was fucking good. Soap holds up his palm in a high-five position which Simon happily obliges, gripping afterwards to pull him in for a genuine kiss in hopes to pour all of his appreciation into where they were connected.

Kissing Johnny like this just simply never gets old. It fills his veins with adrenaline while leaving him as nothing but a helpless participator that begs for more all at the same time. As if his saliva holds a siren song in it. They depart all too soon, resulting in the older to fist at the dress shirt that hugs him in all the right ways. He steadies his breath, loosening his grip to run one singular finger down where the buttons hold the white fabric together all while looking at Johnny through his lashes.

Was he being a tease? Absolutely. Was he taking pride in the way that those abs tensed underneath of the path of his finger? Oh hell yeah. Did he know that they had more important manners at hand and they will not be doing anything like that tonight? Yes. But it's still fun to see Johnny squirm.

"Oi!" His boyfriend hisses, redder than earlier as he grabs the wandering touch, "Behave, Si. Stop looking at me like that because you know that I'll fold and we need to get this done. Plus, I'm pure done in."

Simon laughs, removing his hand to checking the time on his watch. He then turns to Soap, whispering, "Merry Christmas, Johnny."

"Merry Christmas, fuckin' bastard," He gets in reply. No actual venom was in his tone, more sarcastic playfulness than anything actually before he goes back to finishing wrapping up one of Alec's presents. Oh how Simon loves that man.

Once again. He pushes down the claws in his stomach.

The next morning, they're awoken to two children jumping on them and causing matching grunts of pain to come from the two fathers' mouths. "It's Christmas! Wake up! Wake up!" Alec cheers, shaking Simon's shoulders as the blond tries to hide himself away from this brutal attack.

They had spent so long finishing up last night and he really had no interest in getting up any time soon. Yet, this is what being a parent during this time of year is, he guesses. Begrudgingly, Simon sits up.

"C'mon, Johnny. It's go time," He yawns, moving the kids out of the way so that he could clamber over the sleeping figure next to him.

"Lt," He whines, "Just ten more minutes?"

"Kids say no."

He rips the covers off of him while Leah and Alec practically vibrate with barely contained excitement, smiles seeming to be permanently etched onto their faces. Simon reaches out, pulling his lover into a standing position before peppering his still half asleep face with kisses. This of course earns him a chorus of "ews."

Soap crankily swats him away, noises of complaint coming from his chest in the process. Nonetheless however, it gets him shuffling towards the now opened door with his shoulder hitting the frame on the way out. "Ow," a muffled voice mumbles from the hall. How did this man ever wake up on time for drills? Simon has no fucking clue and doesn't know if he ever truly will.

They somehow manage to get the kids to wait until after the adults wake up at least a little bit, though they had watched them grab their respective mugs with nothing but burning anticipation. Simon lets the tea seep deeply into his nerves, closing his eyes against the sensation. A pair of dead eyes flash behind his eyelids and he has to shake it away, grip on the mug fumbling in the process.

He can do this. He just has to survive until after Christmas dinner. One more day.

It gets harder and harder to shove it all down as the morning continues as their kids go through their presents in total glee. He's slipping. He can feel it.

Alec opening his morphs into Joseph in his mind and the smell of copper comes back into his nose. A little toy plane. Simon's hold on the ceramic tightens as he silently begs for it all to just let him go, leave him alone so that he can just allow himself to be happy on this damned day again. Why is this happening now? He was fine last night.

"Don't push yourself," Dr. Gerber's voice echoes in his head. He pushed. Now he's going to fall into this pit in the middle of them opening their presents all because he couldn't pace himself correctly. This was everything he wanted to avoid.

Warm skin on his arm halts the spiral.

Johnny had moved closer to him so that they'd be touching, eyes still zeroed in on the kids who were ranting and raving while totally unaware of what was just bubbling beneath the surface. He swallows those emotions back. They feel like acid going down his throat. Just a little longer. He can do this. It feels unattainable at this point as his body shakes horribly now with unreleased anxiety that had been quickly turning into complete terror just seconds ago but when his partner reaches and takes the cup from his hands to place it on the coffee table, all while keep that now too tight grin on his lips, he recognizes that maybe it's not but he really isn't alone.

It's too much and not enough all at the same time. But yet, they get through opening just fine. Soap had scrambled to clean up the paper as quickly as possible and it does help ease some of it away. Alec runs over to Simon with his new guitar, asking, "Can you make it work for me, Daddy?"

"Of course," He coughs, tone coming out slightly pained. Johnny slowed down his movements from where he was now opening a toy for Sophie, watching the interaction with caution.

Don't think of Joseph. Don't think of Joseph. Don't think of Tommy. Don't think of Beth. Don't think of mum. Focus on the task at hand. That's easy. He can do that.

Right?

He takes the instrument from his son, trying to fall into the distraction with ease. It's proves to be a struggle as none of the keys seem to tune correctly at all, leaving him with frustration both at himself, at the guitar, and at the horrors from the past. Simon takes a second to just breathe. He pushes it all down again, reminding himself that the task

won't get done if there's emotion in the way and Alec will be let down.

So, with a new numbness, he tunes the guitar. It takes him at most ten minutes and the boy hadn't even noticed that there had been any form of internal struggle to begin with. "Thank you!" He chirps, taking it and running off to flop down on the couch where he starts to strum the string haphazardly. It then that Johnny finally makes his move.

"We're going to make breakfast now, you guys. Play nice," He tells their children. He stands up and starts walking towards the archway that leads to the kitchen/dining room but stops to tower over his boyfriend in the process. Simon looks up, a chill running down his spine at the no-nonsense glare being thrown down at him. So the limit was reached and Johnny was definitely going to finally put his foot down. How? He has no idea. But maybe that's what needs to happen because Lord knows that he is not currently making any moves to stop the incoming breakdown from happening, just pushing it away until a further date as things pile on and it gets harder to contain.

Simon pushes himself off the couch and follows. Once their out of sight, he's prepared for— he doesn't know what but it certainly wasn't the Scot grabbing him by the collar of his shirt to pull him into the tightest embrace he had ever experienced in his life. "I love you. I'm proud of you. I'm so proud of you, Simon," Is what's said.

He pulls away, disbelief clearly on his features as Soap reaches up to smooth away the crease in his eyebrow with his thumb. The affection causes it all to bubble up again. Not yet. Not yet. He can't—

A hand rests on his cheek. Kind blue eyes. A soft utterance of, "You can let it out now. You did it."

And then the damn doesn't just break, it shatters.

All at once it crashes down on him, leaving him drowning under the surface of the memories pulling him down. The wants. The wishes that could never be granted like his mother coming by in an hour or two to drop off her own presents for the kids or Tommy making fun of them overdoing it with the gifts. Then, howling at the fact that it had been Simon that made that choice.

The smell of blood, broken ornaments crushing beneath his feet as he stumbles backwards away from the scene with it painted behind his eyes for the rest of his life. How badly he tried to really move on this year— Everything. All at once.

He's back in the embrace he has craved whenever this type of thing happens, even if he doesn't know exactly who it is right now as tears streaming down his face. Silent sobs wracked through his body. He's surprised by this fact but then is reminded of all of those nights as a young boy where he learned how to cry quietly since if he hadn't, his father would only get angrier and come in to terrorize him once more. Simon doesn't know how they ended up on the floor. This seems to be a common occurrence with this specific breakdown. Maybe because it's all so heavy that he can't keep that steady stance that he's usually able to with everything else.

Death surrounds him in everywhere he turns and he doesn't know how to run from it this time. Mum. Joseph. Beth. Tommy. It keeps repeating that way as if some sick montage in his head and he can't breathe. He's back in that grave. Why didn't he stay there to begin with? Mum. Joseph. Beth. Tommy.

He wants it to stop. Those icy and brittle fingertips have gotten a full grasp on him now as they figuratively pull him under with each Christmas bulb. Each sound of his footsteps thumping through a far too quiet house. So much death.

There's a steady sound of a heartbeat. It brings him back to where he is before he slips too deep, listening to the resonance of life against his ear. There's something petting at his blond strands at a comforting pace as hiccups pass through him. Had he blacked out? He doesn't remember getting into this position.

The tears and the memories don't stop but Johnny doesn't leave or force them to move. Just like that night after Simon had gotten himself shot to save him, he stays. He always stays. Once again he's reminded of the conversation he had the last time he found himself on the cold floor with another person and it really sticks this time. He's instructed on how to breathe and he follows it, letting himself be soothed while also allowing himself to finally feel the grief.

Of course, Riley runs in from the living room to lick at his face to disrupt the moment completely. It does help him fall back into his body again, no matter how gross it is.

Damned dog.

—

They don't go to the Christmas dinner. The kids do. They'll spend the night there tonight since their parents have more important manners

to tend to. Instead, they drive all the way to Manchester where Soap remains a comforting presence as they stand by the graves of Simon's family. They're not the only ones in the cemetery, which he can't tell if he's grateful to not be alone in this feeling or horrified that others are experiencing this too.

Johnny doesn't push or pull. Just stays. All the children needed was for him to be there and maybe that's all he really required as well.

Simon crouches down in front of his mother's headstone, opening his wallet to take out one of the pictures that was settled in there. He shoves the item back into his pocket, inspecting the piece of paper that rests in between his two fingers as he prepares himself. A grounding hand is placed on his shoulder. He covers it with his one free one.

He tilts the picture towards the headstone, joking wetly, "You're never going to believe it, mum."

After waiting a beat, he clears his throat and brings the picture back his way. His eyes dance along the people in it, a warmth coming into his chest at the memory. It's Sophie, Alec, and Leah on the youngest of the three's first day at daycare. Both of her older sibling have their arms wrapped around her as they all stand with blinding open mouthed grins on their faces.

Three happy children.

"Bad news, though. They may or may not be Scottish," He jests, earning him a light shove from Johnny which causes him to loosen up a bit. He continues, pointing a finger to each child, "That's Leah. She's the oldest. That's Alec. He reminds me so much of Joseph. And the little rascal there is Sophie. She's turning my hair prematurely grey, I'm telling you. Her and her father. You know about him, Johnny as I call him."

He turns his vision onto his boyfriend, who is now staring down at him with tear brimmed eyes at the implication that Simon has come here before and discussed him. It's true, though. He has.

The blond forces himself to focus on his families graves. "I'm out of the military now. Damned nerve damage that prevents me from doing any long strenuous activity. But I'm sure all of you would happy about that," He sighs.

They sit there for a while. Johnny in silence as he lets Simon have his

time to catch them all up on everything. He knows that realistically, they can't hear him. But he likes to pretend that they can. It helps him sleep better at night sometimes; thinking that they're all out there somewhere, just out of reach, listening to his stories of his life.

It's going to be a while before he gets past their murders. He may never. Still, he's made some progress in that department in his unprofessional opinion, despite the breakdown at the end. He still celebrated Christmas. He did it. There's a good chance that over the years it could possibly get easier. His current family doesn't replace his former one, he'd never expect them to. Rather, they're just an addition onto it and he's at peace with that knowledge. Someday, when the kids are a bit older, he'll take them here and tell them stories about the people he grew up with. But for now, this works.

"Merry Christmas," He tells them.

And the words hurt just as bad as they always have but at least this time, there's a kiss placed on the top of his blond hair that reminds him that he has people to go back home to this time rather than just a house full of ghosts.

Chapter End Notes

I thought about including the kids struggling with their parents death and soap with his sisters but honestly; I wanted it to be mostly Simon centric this time around. It was already so long as is. But I hope you enjoyed and that there's not too many typos or mistakes. LMAO THIS CHAPTER IS WAY TOO LONG TO REREAD THROUGH.

If this is not as good as my other chapters I'm so sorry

New Year, New Developments

Chapter Summary

had to repost -- ao3 deleted half of the chapter for some ungodly reason

New Years comes around. Simon is nervous for what comes next and ends up with a huge surprise from Price that opens up so many new opportunities. Gaz scares the hell of Johnny.

And finally, proposal time.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Simon was nervous.

So unbelievably nervous.

Today was New Years Eve and he couldn't help but stare at Johnny who was on the deck, trying to string up lights for their guests to come later tonight. Simon took a moment to really stare at the love of his life, basking in the way the sun hit his tan skin perfectly, smile on his face as he talked to Alec about what he was doing. The young boy stared up at his father in wonder, bouncing excitedly on his toes.

Simon smiled. All of his anxiety disappeared all at once, dissipating into a nothingness as if it was never there to begin with. Why was he so worried? Him and Johnny worked hard to get to where they are right now, promising through every sleepless night and every hardship that they would get through all of this together. With the proposal, nothing will change. They will still be them and he has nothing to worry about.

"Daddy," A tiny voice says, breaking him out of his stupor. He looks down to see Leah's smiling face, freckles dotting across her nose and blue eyes shiny brightly up at him. "You're staring again," She giggles.

Sophie looks up from where she was scribbling in her coloring book on the floor before staring down at the paper once more and aggressively running the crayon on the paper, borderline ripping it. He bends down at the knees to the eldest daughters height, plastering a smile on his face.

"I'm allowed to stare, love," He chuckles.

She scrunches up her features in mock disgust at his response, as if it actually bothers her and she's not constantly asking them about their love life or when they'll get married or what it's like to have a boyfriend. He thinks maybe it's time they wean her off of the Disney princess love stories before she becomes a hopeless romantic much like Johnny. In all seriousness, Simon finds it incredibly sweet that she looks up to them and sees a love so pure rather than filled with an evilness like he had grown up with. When he was younger, he never understood the concept of love. Even as a young adult, he struggled immensely with it. He didn't believe that it truly existed or that there was a possibility of something like the movies coming into his life, brightening his world in ways he couldn't imagine.

Then, there was Johnny. Someone who was the definition of brightness, lighting up a room like no other. And somehow, he was chosen by him.

The door slides open, sending Tiley barreling into the house and running right into Simon, almost knocking him over until he caught himself with a curse under his breath. Leah's eyes widened. Then, she exclaims, pointing at her father, "Daddy cursed!"

Johnny shakes his head, laughing and pushing Alec inside the house gently, "I heard. Why don't you two go start getting ready for everyone to come over and I'll take care of him?"

"Yes, sir!" Alec answers back with an attempt at a salute before turning on his heel and clambering up the stairs with his older sister chasing after him. Simon stands up straight now, watching the two with anxiety as they seem to battle over who reaches the top first. He expects Soap to yell at them to be careful but it doesn't come. He looks at his boyfriend.

The man had his eyes closed, face fallen into one of barely concealed annoyance as a puff of air exhales through his nostrils. Amusement fills up in Simon's chest at that. He nudges him, whispering, "No 'careful?'"

"They'll learn when one of them falls head first down the stairs," His boyfriend sighs in return.

Johnny moves closer to him, wrapping his arms around his neck and bringing their foreheads together, causing the taller man's hands to go to his hips. His hold is gentle. Loving. That wonderful feeling of his

heart being nothing but full returns just as it always does when they're like this, in each others space and appreciating being around one another. It swells in a delightful way.

He smiles, breathing out, "Then we'll have to deal with the consequences too and each have a minor heart attack of their own."

"Still, they'll learn."

Simon lets out a quiet chuckle, pulling him impossibly closer as a hand comes up to scratch at the back of his head. The action has chills going down his spine. He's aware of Sophie now watching them in curiosity. So, he keeps it in his mind that it's probably not best to kiss your partner senseless with your almost one year old daughter staring at you, no matter how badly he wants to.

Luckily, the front door opens, pulling them away from one another. Gaz, followed by Callie holding a very giggly Adeline, gets a mischievous look on his face as he stumbles back dramatically at the sight of them.

"Woah!" He teases, "In front of the baby? I thought you two were better than that!"

Simon snorts at how red Soap's face gets from the jest before placing a quick peck on his cheek and walking over to greet the guests. "Careful, Garrick. I only tolerate you for Addie," He responds.

"After everything we've been through?"

He hums back, exaggerating an excited look on his face towards their friends' daughter. The little girl squeals in delight, throwing herself backwards causing everyone in the room to have a minor heart attack just as Callie catches her.

The mother breathes out in relief, passing Adeline over to Simon easily. "How are you doing, hun?" She asks, pressing a kiss on his cheek.

That type of stuff doesn't freak him out much anymore due to his therapy sessions with Frank. It's still a work in progress but being part of the MacTavish family, the most tactical group of people alive, you get used to it. And fast. It's nothing he can actually complain about. He inwardly hated it at first. But now, it's growing on him.

He smiles at Callie, answering, "I'm alright. How are you?"

"Excited to dress this baby," She says, stepping forwards and clapping her hands, "Where is she?"

Johnny stomps in from the dining room, Sophie in his arms. His eyebrows are pinched together and his mouth is in a sneer that doesn't actually hold any heat. Now she's done it.

If there's one thing that has started happening as their youngest gets older; it's the Scot getting more and more possessive over doing the things that he won't get to do for much longer. Things being, right now, picking out her clothes and dressing her as if she's some sort of baby doll. Simon, admittedly, finds it endearing. There's moments where he'll try to be the one that gets her ready for whenever they have company or decide to go out and he'll get shooed away like he himself is a misbehaving child. Not that he minds. He's not quite the best when it comes to fashion.

Callie tries to step forwards, arms outstretched but Soap steps back with his eyebrows basically formed together as one now. He swivels his upper body away from her. The action causes Sophie to giggle loudly, "Da!"

Johnny kisses her forehead and pokes around to look at Adeline in Simon's arms. "Your baby is dressed."

"Soap," Callie huffs, "Come on."

She tries to reach again but he steps back, cradling their daughter's head and pressing it against his chest with a dramatic pout. Gaz comes up to stand besides the taller man, watching each other of their respective partners stepping around each other in attempts of battling on who gets to do it. Sophie is howling with laughter at this point, causing Adeline to scream and hit her hands onto the man that was holding her.

"Don't you start now," Gaz mumbles. Simon lets out a tiny scoff. Meanwhile, Soap is continuously side stepping away from Callie in a practiced perfection, probably from his days being a football player. The woman groans.

"You always get to dress her," She whines, stomping her foot.

He shoots back almost immediately, "Because she's *my daughter!*"

"You have two!"

"It doesn't matter!"

"Yes it does!"

"Leah dresses herself!"

The two men not involve bare witness to the events, not knowing how to step in or if they even should. Who knows, if they do, they might somehow get caught in the crossfire. Company will be coming soon and they probably really should settle this before then otherwise Isla will be the deciding factor. She will end up being the one that wins the argument without even being in it to begin with.

Simon can't help the smile that forms on his face. He thinks about how it's nice that these children are so genuinely loved. They're literally fighting over who gets to do something as mundane as putting clothes on her and doing her hair. All because they want that bonding time. It's nice. His childhood was filled with the opposite of this. His mother always had to be the one that got them ready for events because his dad couldn't care less about it, leaving her tired and viewing it as more of a task than anything else. Does he wish that it could've been different for her? Absolutely. Does he hold any resentment towards her? His therapist had made him realize that he does.

It doesn't mean he loves her any less or views her as some sort of villain in the situation. She was a victim too. It was more based around the fact that she had brought him and Tommy into the world with an unloving man and continued to stay with them, watching as he tortured them all. It's not her fault. He knows that. He's worked through this, deciding that while his feelings towards what happened are valid, so was her situation. Being a child of abuse is complicated. It's not black and white. Good or bad. It's all types of feelings that will suddenly arise in adulthood. Maybe some of it repressed. He'll sometimes do things and pause for a moment, looking deeply into himself to consider why he had done it until a memory he didn't even know he had would resurface.

Simon's glad his kids will never know what that's like.

They've suffered a lot. They've been to hell and back again with losing their biological mother and father at such a young age. But he's at least confident that they'll always understand what it's like to be loved.

"Soap, I never get to do it," Callie complains.

The man looks around the room, turning around to look at nothing before facing her once more. "Excuse me but from what I can see, there are two parents here. Me and my beloved Simon," He states, motioning towards his partner, "Both who are fully capable of getting our daughter ready for a party that she's going to pass out halfway through anyways."

"Ha, 'fully capable!' Look at how your boy dresses!" She scoffs.

And Simon is... a little offended. He looks down at his black sweater, picking it up between his two pinched fingers with confusion. He opens his mouth, turning to Gaz. "What's wrong with how I dress?" He mumbles.

The former sergeant pulls a face and shakes his head, signaling him not to take it too harshly. He grunts, looking at Adeline and sighing dramatically which earns him a gummy grin in response. Her little dark curls are pulled back into a into two tiny buns with bows that match her purple shirt. A white skirt to compliment it. He does admit, she looks adorable. But still, he'd be a bad potential future husband if he stepped in and told Johnny to let Callie do it instead. So, he keeps his mouth shut.

Johnny, the love of his life, however has not learned that skill. He looks offended for Simon. Thats when he knows it's all over. "That's my boyfriend you're talking about," He gasps.

"Tell him to dress better and then I'll let you dress Sophie!" She argues.

"Let? Let?! This is my child," He counters, "Besides, I know you're not saying that about him when you've got Mr.Baseball cap over there. The hell is this? Fishing club? When him and Price stand side by side they look like a tinder red flag."

Gaz lets out a choked noise. He throws his hands out in disbelief. Simon wonders, distantly, how this became about the boyfriends rather than the actual issue at hand. Poor Price is involved now and the man isn't even here to defend his own name.

Callie sputters, freezing in her spot from where she was chasing Soap around. Her brown eyes were so wide, it would put golfballs to shame in all honesty. They remain like that, one glaring, one shocked, Simon bored, and Gaz taking off his hat before putting it back on with a grumble of something under his breath. Adeline's eyes flick between the adults as if she senses something that the other ones don't and maybe she does. Maybe they're about to start full out brawling in the

middle of the entryway like two siblings who were fighting over who got to get on the Switch first (something that Simon himself has witnessed and let him tell you, it was almost a bloodbath).

Then, both of them burst out into laughter. Full on from their belly. "Callie!" Gaz yells, eyes shining with something close to hurt.

"I'm sorry, love," She pants, dabbing away the stray tear from her eye with her finger, "But that was funny."

Simon lets out his own quiet chuckle as he hands his friend his daughter once again, hoping that it'll help sooth him. He grunts, taking Adeline further into the house to sit on the couch while saying something by how she at least likes his hat.

Once the blond reaches the two, he places a hand on one of their shoulders each. "Here's how it's going to go. Johnny, you're going to get Soph dressed before your parents get here and start to do it for you. Callie, you're going to do her hair," He instructs, tone falling more into his lieutenant one than the softer one he's learnt to use in order to not scare the children. Well, except for when they're in deep trouble. Sophie stares at her two fathers, knowing that voice all too well but also being aware that it wasn't directed at her because he had made sure not to glance at her while using it. He doesn't want her thinking she's the one that's done something wrong. It's Callie's first time hearing it so she blinks harshly at him in surprise.

"Yes, sir," Soap responds back, his face serious as he nods.

They're about halfway to the stairs when he watches his boyfriend freeze, turning to him with narrowed eyes. It finally set in, then. Gaz has a hand over his mouth from where he sits in vain to try and hide his own laughter. "Damn you, Lt."

Then he's gone.

But as they head to the staircase, he hears a hushed hiss from the other room, "Does he use that tone in bed?!"

Simon smirks to himself, the phrase 'still got it' ringing in his mind as he makes his way over to the other couch to sit down himself. They're silent, listening to the footsteps bounding up the stairs to wait for their cue of when it's safe to talk.

He already knows what's coming. The reason why Gaz and Soap are best friends is because they're very similar in a lot of ways. Being nosy

is one of them. Back on the field, listening to them whisper gossips to one another in the safe house gave some peace of mind despite where they were. It was worse on their nights out at the bar. It's okay, though. He has to ask him for a favor anyways. He wants to make tomorrow romantic in the best way that he possibly can despite there not being a romantic bone in his body. But he'll try. He'll always try for Johnny.

The door closes upstairs and Gaz is immediately placing Adeline on the couch while handing her one of Sophie's toys to distract her with. They tend to share diapers and toys whenever they're at each others houses, not seeing the point of lugging around the diaper bag. It takes a village they say. It's the truth.

The younger man claps his hands before rubbing them together as his smile turns devious. Then, inches closer as he prods, "So when are you doing it?"

Simon chuckles, "Tomorrow. Which, about that, can I ask you to do something for me?"

"Anything, mate."

It sounds genuine. Like Gaz really would do anything for him and he wonders what he's done to deserve this. The friends he has. His family. Soap. Their kids. He quickly shuts down that thinking, knowing it'll only put him in a downwards spiral if he continues.

"Can you take Johnny out tomorrow? Distract him while I set everything up?"

"Of course."

—

They had already figured the adults would get drunk and would have to spend the night. It's New Years. So, they had taken keys and hid them in a place where no one would find them. It was late and Leah was dedicated to staying up, despite the fact that she was practically falling asleep on the couch surrounded by drunk adults who didn't know what the word "quiet" means anymore.

"Ma!" Johnny slurs, leaning his head on his mother's shoulder, "I love you."

The older woman laughs, reaching around to stroke at her son's hair

with a soft smile on her features while Clara slowly pulls out her phone to record this. Simon chuckles to himself, shaking his head. He takes a moment to really admire the man with his blushing cheeks from the alcohol and his tousled hair that was more like a mullet than a mohawk at this point. He was beautiful. How did he get so lucky to have him?

Price and Gaz were arguing in the corner about some board game that they both played as young lads, flailing their arms about. Adeline watches, eyes wide. The living room is packed with people that they consider family, the same ones from all of their parties before. It warms his heart. He sips at his beer casually.

"Daddy," Alec mutters from behind him. He turns around, looking down at the boy before crouching in front of him to get down to his level. His brown hair was starting to get longer and he makes note of that for a moment where they're not at hosting some event.

"Everything alright?" He asks.

"Aye," He chirps, "Want to see my animal crossing island?"

Ah yes. That game that has taken over his family at this point. Sometimes, he'll find Johnny trying to hide in their room and play it while the kids are doing homework. He'll stay on it all night if Simon doesn't take the damn thing from him and hide it. He'll even prioritize it over sex. Which, isn't a big deal. He just finds it funny when he thinks about how often he's the one initiating whenever the game isn't involved.

The kids are horrible with the video game. They'll throw fits when it's time to get off, sometimes even full temper tantrums where they'll throw themselves on the ground and go completely limp so that they're dead weight. Alec especially.

But still, he smiles and says, "Of course."

So he sits there on the floor with his son, getting the grand tour of the shared island that he's seen hundreds upon thousands of times at this point. He doesn't complain. Not once. He likes that the kids feel like they can express their interests with him. The drunk adults blabber in the background over the music playing on the tv and he tunes it out to bond with Alec. He asks questions about things like, "How's the fishin' in this area?" to listen to the way he giggles and tells him that there's not really any areas where fishing is necessarily better. It hits him that he sounds so much like a stereotypical dad. Ones on television that

read the newspaper every morning (yes he does that too) and grunt in response to most questions (....). He ponders himself for a moment. Damn, he's really getting old.

He's so invested in what he's being shown and his own wandering thought that he doesn't even realize that Johnny has officially spotted him. You see, drunk people are very simple creatures, actually. They're a lot like toddlers. They don't have much object permanence until they see something and then they get very excited about it.

He lets out a quiet "oof" when he feels something clumsily crash into him before his back hits the floor with a thump. Alec gasps. He just barely sees the mop of brunet before quick kisses are peppered all over his masked face, causing their son to make an exaggerated yell of, "Ew!"

"Simon," Soap hums happily from where he lays on top of him and then buries his face into the crook of his neck.

Simon feels the tension ease from his muscles at the sound of his voice and starts carding his hand through his hair now, similar to how Soap's mother did earlier. Usually, they're really good with PDA... mostly. But apparently a drunk Johnny could not give a fuck about who else is in the room to witness.

The shorter man sits up and what he sees when he does results in his breath fully stopping as the sound of ringing forms in his ears. The blond is being stared at like he's the best thing in the whole world. Blue eyes shine at him that reflect only love and adoration; so soft. So enthralling. And if he tried to describe it, he doesn't think he really could. He feels like the way his heart physically aches at it dies the trick anyways. In all of their time together, Soap has never looked at him like that and he doesn't know whether it's the alcohol making him more brave to openly fully expressive or if it's a new constant. He wants to have the same skill that Johnny has with a pen and a piece of paper so that he could commit to memory, drawing it so that it will remain fresh forever.

Leah is now peaking over the couch at them, Sophie and Addie following her lead. She's the oldest of the children after all. The oldest girl at that. Every day he sees how much Sophie looks up to her older sister, mimicking her movements. Calling her "Lele." Sometimes even asking for her when she's in pain after tripping. She loves Alec just as much. She'll go out of her way to play with him when he's on the floor trying to practice his guitar. Even if he doesn't pay her any mind.

When he asked Soap about it, the former sergeant only rolled his eyes playfully and said, "Alec is just like me. Just you wait. There might come a day where Sophie starts stealing her clothes and he's watching bloodshed occur over it. When that happens, do not get involved. Trust me, they'll turn on you so fast to defend each other you'll wonder where the hell you went wrong. The best thing we can do is teach them early that sharing is caring."

He's never had sisters but he knows that Johnny has experience in that department. But he has faith in their conflict resolution.

He's pulled from his thoughts once more as a kiss is pressed to his lips, the taste of alcohol following. It's sloppy but it's still everything to him.

"Get a room!" Callie yells, throwing a pillow at them and almost falling off the couch from the action before Clara catches her.

He pulls away, face hot and surely he's redder than a tomato at this point. Simon turns his head to look at their guests, sending Leah into a giggling fit as she tackles the two younger girls onto the couch to avoid being caught. The older man chuckles, swiveling his head to look at his inebriated boyfriend just as his fingers come up to trace along the lines of his scars gently. As if they're something to be cherished. Worshipped.

"Behave yourself, love," He whispers, a smile forming on his face.

Johnny lets out an exaggerated groan before sitting up to let Simon sit once more and flopping his arms down. Part of him wonders if it's time for him to go to bed. Once he's sitting, he feels Price touch his shoulder.

"Come outside with me while I smoke?" He asks.

What could that be about? Simon furrows his brows, anxiety beginning to build in his chest but relaxing when he sees the now retired Captain's face twitch into a smirk. He nods once at him. "I'll be back, Johnny," He states.

"Price no," Johnny scoffs, wrapping his arms around him and pulling Simon close to him now, "Ye cannae just take him. Yer not the boss o' us anymore..."

It's cute how his accent seems to thicken whenever he's tired or drunk.

All that needs to happen is the raise of a bushy brow and Soap tenses up, swallowing harshly. Slowly, he detangles himself from his partner along with a huff to signal that he's not happy about it. It warms Simon's heart.

He leans over slightly, mumbling an, "Don't break anything while I'm gone." It's followed by a quick peck before he's standing and grabbing his coat off the wrack, Price doing the same. They wound their way through the quiet dining room in silence. Then the kitchen. Once to the door, the older of the two slides it open with a gesture for him to go out first. Simon obliges.

The cold air hits him like a god damn brick. He lets out a hiss of a curse as he struggles to get on his coat. It's an action so mundane it hardly feels like him. There was a point in his life where he would've ignored the bite of the frigid air to push forwards in the mission he was on. A hardened soldier. Now all he is is a simple man. A family man. He thinks he likes both versions of him.

He steps further onto the deck, allowing for Price to stand outside also. He was smart. The man had put on his coat before he even walked outside.

The door shuts with a protested squeal. They'll have to put something on that to make it run on its tracks a bit better. All sounds from the party fade into a muffled sound, the quietness of the Scottish countryside being the only thing around them. He looks at the lights that Johnny had been stringing up earlier, internally laughing at the fact that no one's even out here. He had tried to tell him multiple times that would happen. It's too bloody cold out to be sitting outside. Maybe he could get a fire pit. He's sure the kids would appreciate that when they're older too. Leave the lights up. Make it a cool place for rebellious teens to hang out so they're not on the streets causing trouble.

He turns to Price, confusion snuffing out all of the feelings of coldness at the point that he is in fact not lighting a cigar. Instead, he shuffles on his feet. The man lets out a breath, a cloud forming from it.

Anxiety begins to crawl into his chest cavity once more. This feels serious. There's no way he'd make the two of them freeze their asses off all alone if it wasn't. They may both be former military men who've lived through hellish conditions but it was never them particularly seeking it out like this. He frowns.

"You don't wear the mask much these days," He begins.

Simon is even more confused. He doesn't, no. When out in big public spaces he will but typically, he goes without it. To the kids school and daycare, he doesn't wear it. To restaurants if it's not super busy. Lately, he's been trying to make the disconnect from Ghost to Simon. So, he simply responds:

"I'm not Ghost anymore."

Price doesn't say anything back. All he does is take a couple steps forwards so they're standing directly next to each other. He stares off into the forest in the night. A loud cheer is faintly heard from inside, mixed in with joyful squeals from the little ones to solidify his point.

The sentence was heavy. A finality to it. To say those words out loud to Price, who he once snapped at and told that there was no such thing as a Simon Riley anymore but rather Ghost, felt like the final nail in the coffin to the legend of a man. It's mixed feelings. Part of him will always feel a linger of that darkness over him, wanting to grab him and tell him that this is all wishful thinking. Men like him don't get fairytale ending like this. But the part of him that's Simon? That's a father? He thinks he'd kill that version of him in a heartbeat if he tried to win. Maybe he already has.

Realistically, the death of who he used to be wasn't due to his own calloused and scarred hands, though. It wasn't even Johnny's. Ghost died the moment he laid his eyes on those children, taking off the mask when it had seemed to scare them. So easily. As if it was nothing. Soap had been bewildered by the moment. He could see it on his face.

Simon licks his dry lips, regretting it immediately as the winter air bit them in response. Still, he speaks, "When I first came here, my mask scared the kids. I took it off then and the only other time I put it back on was when they were in danger. I don't want them to know the things I've done... The people I've hurt in the name of good. How I earned that callsign that became more of an identity, tied into who I was. I don't want to hold on anymore. I want to finally be free of the burdens that made me become what I was and have stupid normal life with the man I love. Kids. A dog. I don't care if that whole bloody base sees me as weak because of it. It was the strongest thing I've ever done."

A shaky breath is exhaled next to him. When he flicks his gaze over to

Price, he could swear there was maybe a glassiness to his eyes reflected from the lights above them.

"I'm proud of you, son. I say it a whole lot but I am," He trails off, thinking to himself before continuing, "I have something for you."

Simon faces him fully as he digs into his coat pocket on the inside of his jacket. The rustling is loud. Daunting. He pulls out a folder, red in color, and holds it out to him. Somehow, with steady hands he slowly takes it. What the hell could this possibly be?

He opens it, blinking in puzzlement at the contents inside. A birth certificate, identifications, drivers license with a picture of it on him from when he was about a decade younger and a lot less scars. Blue eyes meet brown once more.

"Price, what the fuck is this?"

"As you know, I was a Captain for quite a while. I have friends in high places. When I announced my retirement, they had wanted to give me a parting gift so I asked for you to have a new identity. Last name isn't the same, figured that probably wouldn't have been a good idea considering Simon Riley is still to blame for the murder of his family and I'm sure you would've been arrested in a month if I had done that. But it's not going to stay that way for long. You're going to be a MacTavish soon, right?"

Simon's breath catches in his throat as a huge ball forms within it. His emotions are going haywire. If anyone asked for him to place exactly what he's feeling right now, even Dr. Gerber, he wouldn't be able to place it. It's overwhelming.

He thought when him and Johnny got married, it wouldn't technically be official or legal. They were both okay with that. Loving him meant that. There was no possibility of anything official or legitimate in the eyes of the government when it came to him. No will. No marriage certificate. No estate or properties or cars in his name. Nothing. He was quite literally a ghost walking the earth for so long. How Price managed this? He had no idea. When Simon talked about his rebirth after creating this life for himself, it was always figurative. But now? Well now he's holding actual physical proof of it and it feels so fucking good to finally be normal. A civilian. There's so much he can do now. He can leave his kids with something one day when he goes. He could buy Johnny a new car. In fact, that's the first thing he's going to do with it.

It'll be so much easier on them all. They won't have to rush around with only one driver once Soap starts working again. If Leah has a sleepover with her friends while his hopefully future husband is busy with therapy or something, he could drive her. He can pick up things from the store on the way home.

And Price had given that to him. All held together in one little folder. A new life. A new chance.

Part of him is still anxious about it. What if this is what gets him locked up? Sure, the people who knew what really happened, all tucked away under wraps in a pretty bow, would probably come to his defense but he would still get charged for faking his death. But he won't worry until that actually happens. If it does, that is.

"Sir- Price," He chokes up, "Why—"

"Because you deserve all of the little things everyone else has. You're a good man. I don't want your past holding you back from your future anymore."

"I can't accept this—"

"It's already done. If anyone asks, your middle name is Riley, as per said on the birth certificate. You go by that as a last name because your father left you as a baby."

What's one more secret upon the list that he already has?

He doesn't second guess it. Doesn't allow himself to. He tackles Price in the tightest hug that he's ever given the man. It's warm. It's peaceful. He thinks that this is the way that a father's hug is supposed to feel. Like safety.

Two arms come up and envelope him in a tight embrace, with a pat every once in a while. He doesn't let go. There's so much to say but the words won't come out. Johnny's going to be so excited to hear this. So many possibilities come from this. They'll be better off this way in the future, especially once it gets to the point where he won't be able to do the physical labor of the mechanics shop anymore due to his arm. It hurts more often than not now and he knows it's going to get worse as his body ages, not able to handle all of the work like it used to be able to.

The one who steps back is Price yet he keeps a firm grip on the former lieutenant's shoulder, squeezing it. "So, where's the wedding going to

be?"

Simon chuckles wetly, "Well, if he say's yes—"

"When he says yes," Price corrects. And how he wishes he could have that same confidence.

"If" He pointedly continues, "I think in the backyard. We probably can't afford all of that big wedding stuff. Sure, Johnny's dad has already blatantly told me he's willing to help pay for it— something about it being his job?— But I don't want to do that to him. There's only one half of a family to help with the funds after all. Doesn't seem quite fair to the MacTavish's."

Price looks offended at the suggestion. The blond can't place what exactly he said that was wrong and caused that annoyed expression. It's the truth. There's no family for Simon except this one and the the 141. Plus the kids. None of them should dig into their pockets for him. It's fine. They'll still have a beautiful day and it'll be just for them, as it was before all of this identity stuff had occurred. It's doesn't need to be big and fancy for them to enjoy it. This was perfectly fine. All he needs is Johnny.

But Price doesn't seem satisfied with the idea. Not at all. If anyone would understand, he always thought it would be him. Yet, the man pinches the bridge of his nose.

"You know I don't have any kids, right?" The older finally says.

Now Simon is the one that was lost. Why does that matter? This conversation has been going in all kinds of directions tonight and he's not sure how it got to this topic. "Yeah... So?"

"So," Price drawls out the "o" sound, "I have been setting aside money for the three of you boys for this exact reason. There's plenty for you to have a proper wedding with caterers and a big fancy banquet hall with flowers littering the damn tables that you'll have no idea what to do with when all is said and done."

The second bomb was dropped on him. He's been what? How come this is his first time hearing about this? Why would he do that? He would've expected it for Gaz because they've always been so close but for him and Johnny? Simon wasn't necessarily ever marriage material and the Scot already had two fairly well off parents. So why would he do that?

Also, it seems unfair that they accept that much when Gaz probably has less than the two of them combined. This he really can't accept. That was too much to ask of him. Price is a grown man, capable of making his own decision but he deserves that money. He's worked hard for it. It feel like robbing the man blind, for fucks sake. He shakes his head in a hurried motion, saying, "No. No." as he does so.

"Let me do this for you—"

Simon cuts him off, "Price, absolutely not."

"Come on. One half will go to the wedding and the other half the honeymoon. Soap's a spoiled little fucker, all your fault by the way with how you've always broken your back to give him exactly what he wants, and he would accept the backyard wedding but wish there was a way for there to be more. I know you'll want more too," Price explains.

Simon sighs. He does not spoil Johnny. Maybe. No, he doesn't. Sure, he may shower him with all the love and affection he could muster, plan some huge proposal just for him, break away from his trauma around Christmas just to make wrapping presents a little less taxing on him, will fold every time he sees those blue eyes, and buy him the best damn ring he could but that doesn't equate to spoiling. Does it?

That's not the important part. That would be the fact that Price isn't taking no for an answer. He wants to cry. In fact, he's about two seconds away from crying. All of this has been so much. So emotionally heavy for him.

"Price—"

"It's too late, Simon. It's done. I knew you would protest it so Clyde and I already discussed it."

Clyde the sneaky bastard.

He does end up crying. Once more hugging Price. When they go back inside, Simon hides the identifications on top of the cupboards where he knows his boyfriend won't find them. He'll show him tomorrow.

When Johnny sees him, he immediately rushes over and wipes at the corner of his red, puffy eyes. All the taller man can do is nod in a form of an answer, telling him that he's okay without actually doing it. The brunet then shoots an angry look at Price before grabbing Simon by the wrist to pull him back towards where all the adults were hanging

out, kids not too far off playing. The sound of the captain chuckling behind them is drowned out by all of the noise.

Once the clock strikes twelve, pots and pans banging in the background, the kiss that they share tastes a bit like hope.

"Gaz, this has been your worst idea yet," Johnny groans.

The two men walk through the crowded mall, both embarrassingly wearing sunglasses to protect themselves from the harsh white lighting from above. Why in the hell had he offered to go shopping today? Soap has no idea. He has even less of an idea of why he agreed. They had been in the kitchen, enjoying Simon's breakfast happily when it was suggested.

Callie had decided to stay back, watching their girls playing together with a lovesick look in her eyes. Alec and Leah were still fast asleep since they had managed to somehow stay up when the clock had struck midnight.

All he could really tell you for sure was his head was pounding like a motherfucker, even with the dark film over his eyes. Well, other than the fact that the two men for sure look like total bawbags that that one old song would apply to. They've been to so many different stores, without finding anything actually worth buying might he add, and it's quickly starting to darken outside. All Soap wants to do is go home and crawl into his partner's arms. However, each time he asks if they can leave soon, Gaz will physically begin to sweat buckets at the suggestion before running ahead into a store with interest in an item that he doesn't even get.

It's getting quite annoying. He loves his best friend but he would definitely shake him until his brain hits against his skull right now if he could do so without Callie beating the hell out of him for it.

"Oh, come on, Soap," Gaz urges, "How often do we get to do this anymore? We always have our partners with us or our kids. This is our time."

Johnny almost scoffs at that but manages not to only by biting the inside of his cheek. The tinge of blood on his tongue does nothing to kill off the nausea that's starting to bubble in his stomach.

"I get that but shopping? When have we ever gone shopping together?

We haven't even bought anything."

The other man rolls his eyes, answering with a slightly bothered tone, "I wanted to spend the whole day with you. Is that too much to ask?"

Yes. It is. At least when he's hungover. Any other time he would've jumped at the thought but today was not any other time. He turns his head away and for the first time since they've gotten there, a store catches his eye.

"Hold on a second," He mumbles. The two slow to a stop in front of a jewelry store and he swears that his friend tenses up upon seeing it. He's acting awfully weird today. Maybe him and Callie got into it or something so he's using this as an excuse to get out of the house, leaving the jewelry store to bother him due to it.

He shakes his head, walking into it. The clerk looks up from where she was counting the money in the drawer, sending them a polite smile in the process and a greeting. Soap nods back, turning to the engagement rings to look them over. Gaz is now hurdling questions at him like what was he doing and why are they in the ring sections, all of which he ignores after sending a strange look his way. Okay. Really weird. He should know that at this point, there is no future that he doesn't see his boyfriend in. They've been through hell and back together. Sure, it's a little fast. However, he feels like they've wasted so much time already, first in the military and then when they were "platonically" raising three children together as Simon got on his own two feet outside of being a lieutenant.

It's not that outlandish for him to be doing this. He's wanted to propose for a while now, even going as far to measure the key rings that Simon will sometimes swing around his finger and calculate the sizing of the ring he'd have to buy.

They were serious. They both agreed that they were going to get married and Soap had already decided that he was going to propose after the holidays, something Gaz knows. So he doesn't understand the confusion. "Gaz," He sighs without taking his eyes off of the display for even a moment, "You're acting really off today."

"No, I'm not," He responds, a little quickly.

Soap raises an eyebrow at his friend who looks as if he's sweating buckets at this point. He takes off his sunglasses, crossing his arms and giving him his signature "talk, now" expression. It may have been something that he had actually learned from his beloved boyfriend but

Gaz doesn't have to know that.

He watches the other man groan, ripping off his own shades. "I'm just —" He pauses, thinking over his words carefully, "Are you sure he's ready for this? It's the Ghost."

Soap, ever the patient father of three kids, answers gently, "The Ghost is gone, Gaz. He goes by Simon fully now. We don't need to be those men anymore and he's actually been doing really well in therapy."

"Maybe, yeah. But I don't want you rushing into something and getting your heart broken..."

It's a good reasoning. Anyone outside of their relationship thinking this way makes sense but he's the one in it. He knows Simon. They've talked about this. Plus, some part of him still feels as if he's not getting the full truth out of him. Call it a gut feeling.

But he won't make him talk about what's actually going on. He's not sure he really wants to know. Yet, he does. Johnny can't bear the thought that maybe there's something that Gaz knows that he doesn't about their relationship; something that is making him act so strangely and try to get him not to propose. "What? Did he tell you something that I'm not supposed to know?"

"No."

The tone is rushed once more, teeth clacking shut. It's a lie. His heart drops and his blood rushes to his ears. "Spit it out, Garrick," He grumbles, "What did he say? Does he not love me anymore?"

Wouldn't that just be a kick in the ass? It's something that he always feared would happen and if that's the case, he's not sure how he'd survive. They've built a life together, one that he thought was shatter proof and resistant to anything that could come between them. He feels the fear building, a cold grip around his heart that squeezes tightly.

Gaz's face softens at that. He sighs, shaking his head, "Soap, he loves you more than anything."

"He's not cheating on me right?"

"No! God, no, mate. Jesus."

"Then I'm not understanding," The Scot whispers, almost brokenly. He

hates how this is getting in his head. He hates even more that Gaz looks so torn right now, seeming like he's in the middle of a tough decision. Which, that isn't what he wants for his best friend either. He's so confused by this whole interaction. Never mind that, this whole day.

The making him come out a night after partying without buying anything. The sudden sweat budding on his forehead. All of it. It was really making him feel worse and now, out of spite, he's going to buy that damn engagement ring. Gaz doesn't reply immediately, instead looking at the jewelry and stepping forwards with awe clear on his face. Johnny takes that as his cue to drop the questioning for now, not wanting to pick a fight. Plus, it's in his best interest to actually enjoy this moment.

"I don't want you to impulsively jump into anything, is all," He finally says, a finality to it.

Soap can't help but smile, feeling a warmth spread in his chest like no other. Both at the fact that his friend was trying to look out for him and the knowledge that he isn't jumping into anything. This is all he's dreamed of for a long time. Late nights with Simon and him dancing along to no actual music, holding each other tightly, open-lipped smiles planted against each other as hands cradled faces and carded through hair. Afternoons filled with laughter as he spun Alec around on his shoulders, Soap anxiously asking him to be careful while Leah and Sophie laughed. Soft mornings when he'd wake up before Simon on the weekends, admiring the way the light bounced off his naked back.

Nights when they would argue back and forth, outside so the kids don't witness it. The moments when he lost his boyfriend to the memories that would haunt him and he'd hold the blond, waiting for him to come back patiently. Soap waking up screaming and breathing as if someone's choking him, still feeling the bullet pierce into his arm or the way the Chicago wind hit against his back. Leah crying in their arms after a particular bad dream about the accident. Alec's panic attacks, calmed by them singing to the boy. Sophie throwing temper tantrums, choosing to torture Simon with them for some reason.

All of the good. All of the bad. It's what he wants. So as the rings glimmer at him, he admires them. They've come such a long way. They deserve this.

"I love him, Gaz," Soap wistfully mumbles, "More than I've ever loved

anyone else. I want him to be permanent."

When he looks over at his the former sergeant, his eyes brown eyes are glassy and his lip wobbles ever so slightly. "Yeah?"

"Yeah."

Johnny's pocket feels way heavier than it just had a couple miles down the road. The front porch light of their big, two story house, so obviously lived in by a happy family with a little football net and tiny big wheeled bikes, illuminates the otherwise dark house. Which, in itself is strange. It's barely just gotten dark. Maybe the kids had an early bed time. Instead of wondering too much about that, however, he focuses on the little things. The ash tray on the porch railing, filled with stubbed out cigars. The car in the driveway.

Everything that screams "them." The box is haunting him, begging to be opened and allow for the ring within to be presented to Simon. It feels as if butterflies flutter around his stomach, making his heart rate stumble over itself. He can do this.

Soap inhales deeply, allowing for the feelings to go away. Nothing really changes with this decision, technically. It's not like the can actually legally get married with Simon's past and everything but to them it's real. It'll always be real. They'll be husbands. They're going to raise up their children in this big ol' house, watch them grow into the people that they will become with a guiding light and doors always open just in case they stumble a bit through life. Their dog will grow old some day and be buried in the backyard. It'll be perfect. It'll be them.

"You alright?" Gaz asks gently.

Soap turns to him, smiling softly. "Aye," He sighs, "Working up the courage to go in."

With that, he earns all too knowing beam back, white teeth flashing in the night. The other leans in, stating in a voice that's so unbelievably soft, "I think you should."

For the millionth time that day, confusion hits him like a brick but he snuffs it out as laughter comes from Gaz with a grounding pat to the shoulder. Johnny nods once, jerkily, sure. Then he fixes his jacket and his hair, hoping to seem more presentable for his boyfriend on the

other side of that front door— hopefully soon his fiancé. Then, he gets out of the car, closing the door and making his way up to his home, the pesky butterflies back once more.

He shakily grabs his keys out of his pocket, shocked to find the door already unlocked. The brunet turns back to his friend's car that was still sitting out front of the house, earning an enthusiastic thumbs up back.

When he walks into the door, everything stops.

The house is dark, well it should be if not for the soft yellow candlelight littering the space along with many bouquets of roses along the floor. But none of that's what gets him. No, what does it in for him is Simon in the middle of the floor, all dressed up in a tux, on one knee with papers littered in front of him, and an open box with a ring in it in his hands. His blond hair is slicked back with one unruly wave hanging from it on his forehead. Those beautiful, brown eyes are soft. But really, it's the cheeky grin on his face that's so bright, so radiant, it punches the breath right out of Soap's lungs.

"You wanted it to be romantic, right?" He starts with a breathy chuckle. Johnny forgets all about the his own ring that he has packed away, letting out all of the air he's been holding in a choked out sound before shuffling forwards over to his partner with an extended hand. Simon reaches out, grabbing it. The warmth from their conjoined fingers sends warmth all the way up to his already racing heart.

He hardly feels it. All he can think about, all he can see, is Simon. So soft. So gentle. So loving, Simon. The man who is currently asking for his hand in marriage. Johnny feels dizzy with the feel of it all. He's sure that he would've passed out if not for the sheer stubbornness of him wanting to get that damned jewelry on his finger.

Simon continues, swallowing thickly and rubbing a comforting thumb on his knuckle, "I know you're probably upset that I beat you to the punch, but that's what I said would happen, right?"

Johnny laughs wetly, wiping at his eye that is currently stinging with his free hand, shocked to already feel the wetness of forming tears. At one point in his life, he would've probably been embarrassed about crying but not now. Not with him. Especially not with the way those brown orbs are seeing into him, as he was everything in the world. He believes that maybe, just maybe, to Simon, he is.

The former lieutenant speaks again, voice shaking, "I'm horrible at

speeches, you know this. However, I'm going to try. For you. When you came into my life, you were like this massive title wave of everything I never knew I wanted. From that little quip on the tarmac and a punch to the shoulder, I was yours. When we got betrayed by Graves, I thought that was it. I lost you. But I still stayed, hoping to any God that may be up there that I was wrong. I've never been so glad to be wrong in my whole life..."

It's true. The stupid man, gorgeous stupid man, hates being wrong. Stubborn as a mule. But he's Johnny's.

"You fought like hell to get back to me and I've never thanked you for being so strong. There's so many things in my life that you have given me, in fact you brought me back to life," Simon shudders, his own eyes getting glassy now and voice thickening as he fights against the rawness of his emotions, "Before you, I was a dead man walking. Only one purpose. To be a machine. But you found me and gave my life a whole new meaning, first with your smile, then with your laughter. Soon after, this life. I never want to lose you and I promise, you'll never lose me. You know how I venture a little close to the obsessive side. But I'm hoping, despite all of my flaws, despite the scars that I have, you'll want this just as much as I do. So, John MacTavish, will you do me the honors of marrying me?"

And Soap would be an idiot not to. His heart is so full with love, with adoration at this moment that only one word can come to his mind. He drops down onto his own knees, ignoring the loud thud and the little pain that comes from the action in order to grab Simon's cheeks with both of his hands and pull him into a seething kiss. They both taste of salt from their tears but he could care less.

Everything's perfect. Nothing could ever touch them like this. All of the harm they've faced in their lifetime, all of the guilt that sometimes hangs over their heads— none of it. Right now it's just them. Simon kisses back feverishly, humming in content. He grabs at the collar of Soap's shirt pulling until he rests in between his legs as the blond falls onto his ass. Johnny's own hands wander down his chest, feeling the muscles underneath of the shirt. He pulls away, a lovesick smile on his face.

"So that's a-"

"It's a yes," He cuts him off, pulling away enough to hold out his finger. Soap thinks back to that conversation in the dining room, fondly thinking about how Simon asked him if he wanted a ring. Now,

watching those pale fingers slowly slip it on, he could burst at the seams with happiness.

He's got his ring.

Simon reaches up once he's done, eyes half lidded but frantic once he forces Johnny to meet his gaze. Brown searches blue. There's a groan of, "God, I love you so fucking much" before those lips meet his once again.

Soap feels high off his ass, dopamine levels probably off the charts. The only thing that matters is the way that he gets pulled impossibly closer to the man in front of him, a surprised gasp passing his lips at the feeling of him being pulled on top of him instead. Simon takes that as his window to slip his tongue into his mouth, licking into it and moaning when he feels the way that it causes his new fiancé to tremble.

The moment is broken when Johnny tries to scramble impossibly closer but his foot slips, hearing the sound of paper against floor. He pulls off, earning a literal whine from Simon when he does. God, that was intoxicating. It then dawns on him that the door is still wide open too. Also, that he has his own proposal to do. So reluctantly, he sits up to grab at the the cursed paper. But not before admiring how his future husband looks right now, heaving on the floor with a pretty blush tainting his usual pale skin, lips swollen with spit on them like a gloss, and eyes clouded over with lust.

He's a sight to see. For sure. Johnny can't stop himself from crawling over him and placing one last, lingering kiss. He hisses at the way that those hips buck up into him, chasing what they had gotten started.

With the resolve only a man in the military could possibly have, he detaches himself fully to pick up the sheet. "What's this?" He questions, tone gruff as he observes the lettering.

Soon after, Simon is crowding his space, arms wrapping around him and pulling Johnny's back to his front. Soap can't begin to focus on the actual wording, too lost in the kisses and the bites that start to be pressed onto his throat. The Scot rolls his eyes back involuntarily, craning his neck to get more of the sensation before a chill travels down his spine.

"That's," Simon mutters into his skin, giving Soap goosebumps, "Is our ticket to a legitimate marriage. One of the many gifts from Price."

Soap yanks out of his reach, just enough to turn and look back at him. He sees no jokes. Only pure happiness. It's then that he finally drags his gaze back down to the paper, fully reading it. A birth certificate. So, he finally picks up the rest of the objects, finding multiple identification's including a drivers license.

Those big hands start venturing underneath his shirt, feeling the way that Johnny shivers underneath of them. "I'm going to buy us new cars," Simon whispers, placing his mouth directly over his ear, "We're going to get married in some big, overpriced venue. Go on a honeymoon that we actually have to fly a public airline to..."

The hot breath against his earlobe is slowly unraveling him as he bites his lips hard enough to draw a bit of blood. Not yet. He can't give in yet. Those words, despite how absolutely bonkers they're driving him, are important. He can do this. But Simon really tests him with a hushed, "I'm going to take your last name and become yours. Officially. I'll wear it with more pride then I've ever worn my own..."

Johnny turns his head, capturing his fiancé's lips in a captivating way. It's dizzying. He's beyond worked up at this point. He detaches them once it starts to heat up once more, panting, "Stand up."

Simon, obviously misunderstanding, smirks devilishly while scrambling onto his feet. Once his hands start to go to his belt, Soap bats them away gently. "Not yet, bastard," He jokes, "Though you'll be getting plenty of that tonight too. Trust me."

One blond eyebrow raises in suspicion, though he can see the way want flash in his eyes nonetheless. How did he ever get so lucky. That's when he seems to come to the realization that the door is still open and embarrassment flushes on his face as he winces.

"You think Gaz saw any of that before he ran off?" Simon asks.

Johnny bursts out into genuine laughter, nodding. Gaz, ever the nosy, was probably watching the proposal that he obviously knew was coming, maybe even recording before he had ran off into the night like a bay out of hell when things started picking up. Deserved for the way he scared the hell out of the poor Scotsman earlier with his damned, "are you sure?" talk.

Soap watches Simon go to close the door before he comes back, very obviously adjusting himself which lead to a snort coming from the brunet. He lifts a middle finger in his direction. Then, the man comes back once more bending over to scoop up the papers. He pauses.

Once again, he shoots a suspicious glance his way.

"Why in the bloody hell are you still on the floor?"

Johnny grins wolfishly. Afterwards, he lets out a long sigh, reaching into his jacket pocket. "Oh I don't know," He mumbles, pulling out his own little box, "Maybe because of this."

He wanted a picture of the shocked look on Simon's face, highlighted by the way the candles lit his feature with a warm glow. The taller's hands start to tremble, as he spins in circles, not knowing where to put them before his eyes zero in on the coffee table and he's rushing over to it. Soap chuckles to himself, readjusting so he's now the one on one knee this time. When Simon comes back, he's standing ramrod straight.

Though, he jests, "Couldn't let me have it, could you, Johnny?"

"Never, Lt."

The warm smile that simple nickname gets him is enough to power all of the solar system and then the world. Johnny reaches out, grabbing his hand. He lets out a shaky breath, forcing them to make steady eye contact that hopefully says "it's okay."

Based on the way Simon relaxes, he would say it translated.

"I'm not sure if my speech is going to be better than yours by far because holy shit, Simon. That was everything," Johnny compliments, getting a shy pull of the man's lips in return, "I didn't even know you had it in you. All of this, the flowers, the candles, the speech, is exactly how I dreamed it would be. You're everything I hoped you would be and some."

Simon sniffs, trying his best not to let the tears from earlier come back full force. He gets a squeeze from where they held hands for his efforts as a sign of comfort while also being a way to tell him it's alright to let go. It's a little funny, in retrospect, considering he was the one that was just pouting his heart out followed by almost jumping Soap's bones. Johnny knows him, though. He knows him better than he knows the back of his own tan hand. Giving affection is easier, receiving it is next to impossible.

Accepting it? That's horrifying. Yet, Simon lets out a shaky exhale of air and gestures for him to go on. He does. He'd do anything that man asked him to.

"When I heard all of the stories about you, they sounded more like scary camp stories. I was never phased. When you seemed surprised by my casual touch, I had known the truth. You were a man. Maybe a professional. Even a killer. But you were never the monster that they made you out to be," Soap voices, seeing the tear slip from his partner's eyes as his eyes shone even more with gratitude and glossiness, "You're the best damn thing that's ever happened to me. You're patient, you're kind, you're so unbelievably attentive and loving, bordering a wee bit on the spoiling side, honestly."

Simon's shoulders shake from a quiet laugh. The ache in Johnny's cheeks from how wide his smile is was hardly even noticeable at this point. He was too busy hoping that the words hit the way they're supposed to and that he hears him. Actually hears him.

The man continues, "You're an amazing father. They adore you. Alec wants to be you, I'm pretty sure. A monster isn't that. Getting to know you has been the biggest honor of my life. Getting to kiss you? To be with you? To have you by my side constantly when I need you to be? It's more than a dream come true. Sometimes, I don't think I even deserve it. You've always been what kept me going, whether you're Ghost, Lt, or Simon. I want every part of you. For the rest of our lives... So, considering you beat me to it like the annoying bastard that you are, do I even have to ask?"

He watches the blond shake his head, sniffing with a sound of humor following it. Johnny, ever the tease, pulls the ring away as he reaches his hand out, licking his lips and enjoying the way that Simon's eyes track the movement despite the heartfelt moment. "I'm sorry was that a no? You don't want to marry me? I'm hurt, Si. Truly hurt."

As if a petty child, the taller man holds out his hand with a pit more vigor, growling, "Give me the damn ring, love."

Johnny cackles lightly at the frustration. Still, he gives in. Just as he always does. He takes out the ring and slides it on, admiring the way the diamond strip glows in contrast to the black band against the yellow light. He doesn't get much time to do that though. Without warning, a pair of lips crash against his so passionately he would've lost his footing if he was standing. He grunts into it, reciprocating.

Simon sinks down to his height, snaking a hand around his waist and spreading out his palm against his back without ever breaking where they meet at the lips. The heat of his palm passes through the thin fabric of Johnny's shirt like a beacon, guiding him as the bigger of the

two begins to lay back, pant legs brushing against each other with rustles. Once he's fully on his back, Soap climbs on top of him, looking over at his fiancé (he'll never get tired of that) in hunger.

He leans forwards to brush their lips together, grabbing Simon's now ringed hand with his own, they clasp them together in unison. "Where's the kids and that damned dog?" Johnny breathes heavily.

Simon clutches the back of his shirt, pulling it out from where it was tucked into his pants. "You're parents have 'em. They knew I was going to propose tonight and wanted us to have our 'privacy.'"

Johnny scrunches up his nose at that, barely there amusement bubbling up at the way his *fiancé* mimics the movement. For not the first time tonight, he wonders how he got so lucky.

"Not sure if I like the idea of my parents knowing what I'll be getting up to tonight."

The man underneath of him visibly holds back a tremor at that, mumbling innocently, "And just what will you be getting up to?"

"Oh, you're going to be the death of me, Simon Riley."

"Don't go dying on me before you make me a MacTavish."

Johnny surges forwards at that, moaning at the way their teeth clank together as they paw at each other desperately. He feels Simon squirming around underneath of him before the sound of something hit the floor. He detaches enough to look back at the source of the sound, letting out a gasp when the other man takes that as sign to start attacking his neck. He feels dizzy once more, though the hangover is just an afterthought at this point.

He can hardly focus on the fact that it was Simon's shoes. Too zeroed in on the way that the sucking and biting is at his throat before an apologetic tongue runs over it. They're usually good about leaving marks, no matter how badly the possessive streaks in them both want to place them in sight. He guess that tonight, right now, is different. Johnny swivels around looking over the beauty of a man once more as he detaches from him, regretfully it seems. "Right here on the floor?" He ponders allowed, feeling a pool of heat at the way his eyes light up in mischief.

Simon leans up enough to press their mouths together with an open mouthed grin, no actual kissing involved. "It's romantic don't you

think? The flowers, the candles?"

"Aye. The soreness we'll certainly feel tomorrow," He adds on, sarcasm dripping from his deep gruff.

"Glad you caught the message, sergeant."

That puts a shiver right down Johnny's spine. It's not long before the brutal attack on his throat begins again and he feels the jacket start to be pulled off his shoulders. He maneuvers as best as he can at this angle to help, hearing the article of clothing plop against the floor where there are no candles anywhere near it, not wanting to start an actual fire. That would be an embarrassing story to tell the fire department. He's sure they'll get a good laugh out of it.

Simon's ringed hand goes back to immediately grabbing at Johnny's, breath catching his throat at the way it gets pinned to the ground. He's so beautiful. So fucking gorgeous. Especially dressed up like this. Even though he's excited to get a good idea of what he'd look like at their wedding, he's wants so badly to rip that damned tux off of him.

"So do it," A breath on his jugular tells him, signaling that he said it out loud. Rather than be embarrassed about the fact that he's said his thoughts out loud, he follows Simon's request.

"Let me see it!" A shriek comes from Isla as she dashed out her front door way quicker than any woman her age should be able to, arms waving excitedly.

Johnny huffs out an awkward laugh as she reaches him, pulling up his hoodie collar ever so slightly so his poor mother doesn't see what he has going on underneath of it. The morning sun is brutal on his eyes as he squints at his father, coming out of the house with Sophie on his hips and Alec and Leah following. They just make it out themselves before Riley comes barreling out of the house with loud barks of happiness while he prances around the farmhouse yard in circles.

Sophie screams at him, slamming down her hands but the dog doesn't listen. "That's right, Soph," Soap's father laughs, "You tell him."

Johnny hardly even has a moment before his mother his tugging at his ring finger, ogling at it with misty eyes. "Oh, it's even more gorgeous on you," She cops, placing a frail hand in front of her mouth.

"Not better than the one I got him, though," He quips, turning a head to Simon just as his father stills over and places down Sophie, allowing her to go run and play with her siblings.

He gets an eye roll from his *fiancé*. It's followed by a light, "Always a competition, huh Johnny?" Then he unwraps his arms from around him and shows the MacTavish's his own ring.

Soap's father whistles, "Pretty little dent that must've cost your savings, aye John?"

He's too busy staring at Simon in adoration to even notice the way his father had suddenly paled and tensed up. It's only after a beat of silence that he turns. There's a clear expression of horror on the older man's face as he gestures to his neck and makes a pulling up the collar motion.

Oh. Oh no.

Ungracefully, Johnny reaches up, tugging at the hoodie to pull it up even further to cover the marks that were clearly showing. If it hadn't been for the fact that he's sure Simon was dying already next to him, he would've killed him himself. His mother glances at three men, now all awkwardly shuffling in place without making any eye contact. Please don't ask. Please don't ask. Please don't ask. Please—

She prods, "What?"

None of them answer. She once again takes her now suspicious gaze on all of them right as Simon conveniently stares at his shoes that scuff the ground. Soap clenches at the hoodie tighter. Seeming to catch this, the woman rips his hand away as he tries to break away from her but to no avail. With a tug down of the collar, Soap is convinced that hell on Earth has just graced upon them with the sound of his mother's gasp of pure disbelief.

"Oh Steamin' Jesus!" She exclaims, ripping the newspaper from her husband's head before promptly starting to hit Simon with it lightly. The poor man is now holding his arms up, a chuckle coming from his mouth.

"Don't laugh! That's my son you did that to!" She scolds, "Are you a vampire or something?"

Johnny comes up and gently tries to ease his mother away from his partner, going to soothe her. That however, goes down the drain when

he feels his own gut to his head, much harsher than the treatment that was just be given before and rolled up this time, with a thunk. "Ow! Ma!" Soap whines, rubbing the spot. In result of that he gets another one, that he ducks away from.

Loud, very Scottish expletives are thrown his way. The gist being "How dare you show up to your parents house like that?!" That he's sure that Simon doesn't at all get as he witnesses what's going on, biting his lip to stop the laughter from pouring out once more, knowing it'll be back to him if he dies. Just like that, leaving his poor defenseless fiancé to suffer alone. Throughout all the whacking, Clyde comes up and claps a hand on his shoulder.

"Welcome to the family."

Chapter End Notes

okay so as a treat for y'all being patient, I let there be a little more spice than usual.

As an even bigger treat, if you want because I'm a fucking tease, I will give permission for you to write the full smut scene if you so please. Just tag me and let me know so I can put a link to it at the end of this chapter and beginning of the next chapter for anyone who wants to read it.

I hope y'all enjoyed it. Sorry if it's a little bleh. Getting back into the full swing of things so it may take a second. :) here you go. I promise the story isn't dead :)

That being said, I'd like to have a more serious conversation. please stop sending me asks on tumblr about when the next update will be or if the story is discontinued. this has been happening a lot and has been a common occurrence for a while. It's really overwhelming when I'm already dealing with a lot in my personal life or even just writers block. I know this chapter took a sec but this was happening even when I was updating every day. I don't want to push out bad chapters bc I feel guilty so please just remember author is human and be respectful, okay?

That being said, if you want to come hang out, the @ for my tumblr is gaylittleeddie
The @ for my twt is @GHOSTSGAZ.

I'm glad to be back :)

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!